Granddaughter of the Sun

Mnemosyne

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Granddaughter of the Sun

A Study of Euripides' Medea

By

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PREFACE

A MONSTER NO MORE

αὐτὴ δὲ γαῖαν εἶμι τὴν Ἐρεχθέως.
I am going to Athens.

Euripides, *Medea* 1384

What new do I have to say about Medea? I started out, forty-some years ago, thinking that through her actions Medea was metamorphosed into something inhuman. I even referred to her as "a monster in her car."[1] But life and circumstances have made her more familiar. I never thought I would come to esteem her or know others who felt admiration for her, but again and again I have had students, especially women students, tell me that she was their favorite character, a good sign, I hope, because it indicates that they know the difference between theatre and real life.

This work is addressed to teachers, scholars, and advanced students of literature, classics, and drama and will, I hope, be of particular interest to Euripides enthusiasts. It looks at some aspects of the play that are largely overlooked in the criticism. It aims for an open and multiple reading. It also attempts, in deference to generations of students past, to show that the stories and people of myth as presented in the drama of fifth-century Athens are not unrelated to human beings who actually exist.

Granddaughter of the Sun is arranged as follows:

Introduction: The Polysemous Medea. Medea has a history that is known to outsiders. Her origins are divine and she may have started her circuitous story as a goddess. She may even have been originally Greek. In Euripides' drama, she is shown to be the many things a human being is capable of, good and evil, and much that is in between; weak and powerful; loving and hating, rational and passionate. Rock, lion, god, demon, which she is called at one time or another: she is all of these and none of these.

[1] In Luschnig (1988: 98).

Chapter 1: An Ideal Woman. Medea settles down in Corinth as the perfect wife to Jason, building his house and family: this short-lived chapter in her history sets the story against a recognizable reality and makes it more real and more terrifying when marriage and humanity fall into chaos. This is not the usual reading of the *Medea*, but there it is in the text.

Chapter 2: Medea and Jason. Jason sets himself up as the opposite of his wife. Though he tries to separate himself from her and to deny the interconnectedness of their lives, he finds himself caught in her story and her words. Their hierarchical relationship is defined and redefined in two scenes from their marriage.

Chapter 3: ? ex machina. Even in the fantastic dragon-chariot she remains one of us. Her command of the supernatural separates her from us. But her words, her feelings, and—as distasteful as it is to admit—her deeds make her one of us. Evidence of this is that she is accepted wherever she goes.

Chapter 4: Medea and her Children. Medea's farewell to her children with all its contradiction and rapid shifts is central to the drama and to our understanding of her character. References to the children throughout the play are gathered in an appendix.

Chapter 5: Medea in Corinth. Political aspects, from the terms of power that surround Creon and his daughter to the staging of Medea's speeches and the radicalization of the chorus, are examined.

Chapter 6: The Slave's Voice. This chapter considers the slaves in the play, especially the two anonymous characters of the prologue and tries to discover how their status illuminates the central figures.

Chapter 7: The Battle of the Stories. All the characters try to take over the story, by wishing away the past or controlling the future. Euripides points to changes in the story so that Medea can seem to be changing it herself. This chapter looks at Medea as the author of herself.

Afterword: Medea Among Us. The story of Medea continues to change.

In this book, which began to take shape nearly ten years ago, I have tried to look at Medea in a more positive light: to look not just at her failed relationships, but her successful ones too; to comment on her intellect and not just her clever manipulations of men; and to see her

or her author, who brings Medea home to Athens, as something of a political hero. He/She teaches us that even an outsider can understand the system and change her world.

Before the play even opens, Medea, the free woman, princess, goddess (or close kin to the gods) has been treated by Jason as if she were his spear prize (or a pirate's booty). She has been discarded for a richer princess, better connected in kin and clout, in a story that turns out to have one princess too many.[2] Creon treats her as a non-person without any rights in the city-state. This is what she is in Hellas. Without Jason she is nothing in the social setting of family or city-state and therefore barely human. This is certainly something she learns in the Creon scene (the second part of the first episode). The laws under which the self-satisfied chauvinistic Jason claims she lives do not apply to her (537–8). How could she have respect for such a society, for Greek law and order? Her answer is destruction on both levels of society. She destroys both *polis* (but only because Creon has made himself the state) and *oikos* (Jason's, but not any of the others in the city-state). She can be so effective only because she has learned well what these civic and family values mean to the men who believe they can control her fate and their own. We cannot fault her or Euripides for not replacing these social institutions with something else. Creon and dramatic convention gave her only one day to work. Euripides, gives voice to those usually silenced: to slaves, women, foreigners, to those whose humanity has been diminished or denied.[3]

The power of Medea is enhanced by the fact that the intentional murder of the children may well have been an invention on Euripides' part. In other versions the children were killed by Creon's kin, by the people of Corinth (sometimes by just the women), or by Medea accidentally.[4] Although the priority of Euripides in making Medea the murderer is in dispute, it could explain both the ancient scholion (*ad* 9) that tells us the Corinthians bribed Euripides to remove the stain of this legendary murder from them and Aristotle's mention of Medea knowingly killing her children in Euripides (*Poetics* 1453b28–9).

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[2] One could say, of course, that Jason is just doing what heroes do, fulfilling his destiny and that Medea is thwarting him. But the story, in this version, is not told primarily from his point of view, but from hers.

[3] See Rehm (2003: 52), "Although Greek tragedy has little to say directly on these matters, the plays overflow with refugees, exiles, suppliants, slaves and prisoners-of-war."

[4] On the sources, see Page (1938: xxi–xxv), McDermott (1989: 9–24), Mastronarde (2002: 44–64).

On a less political note the book is about the words in the play and reflects my interest in Greek word order (discussed in more detail in the Introduction).

> αὐτὴ δὲ γαῖαν εἶμι τὴν Ἐρεχθέως. (1384)
> I myself will go to Erechtheus' country.

In this very line the homeless Medea both surrounds the land (<u>αὐτὴ</u> δὲ γαῖαν <u>εἶμι</u>) and is already embedded in it (γαῖαν <u>εἶμι</u> τὴν Ἐρεχθέως).

INTRODUCTION

THE POLYSEMOUS MEDEA

> Yet perhaps what's called love is really an empathetic and hungry imagination. One must be willing to enter other stories—even terrifying or dangerous ones, or those of uncertain outcome.
>
> Martha Cooley, *The Archivist*

Medea became part of Jason's legend. Joining Orpheus and the other heroes picked up along the way, she boarded the Argo at its destination. For the Greek men, the plan had always been to return home with their booty, both treasure and fame; but for her, once she had joined Jason and left her family, there could be no route back to an old way of life on the return journey. In Colchis, she becomes part of *his* story, entering upon a dangerous exploit, always in flight, venturing into the unknown with him. Starting with nothing but herself, she learns new ways, the ways of women with men and the ways of the Greeks, customs she could not have learned at home (see *Medea* 238–9). At every step she contributes to his story, killing the dragon (480–2), killing Pelias (486–7). By then it has become their myth.

But she also entered into the normal life of a wife and mother and a resident in a community of citizens and their wives. From the words of her Nurse in Euripides' play that bears her name it seems that Medea was able to attain this normalcy (10–4), but her husband, the successful adventurer, was not. Heroes from myths rarely can accommodate themselves to life as it is lived by human beings, struggling for a livelihood, struggling to bring up their children to be good, or even simply living human lives without grand aspirations. Tragedy, especially Euripidean tragedy, is self-consciously made of the juxtaposition of two kinds of lives. On the one hand heroes cross the boundaries, whether geographical (like Jason), social (like Helen and Medea), anthropological (like Heracles), or sexual (like Oedipus) and on the other ordinary husbands, fathers, and citizens (like Jason in Corinth, like Heracles, Oedipus, Agamemnon at home), wives and mothers (like Medea, Helen, and Clytemnestra) try to live human lives. Family life is at the center of most surviving Greek tragedies. In many of the tragic stories,

terrible errors are made or crimes committed which not only make the stories so moving that they have lasted thousands of years but also add to both their accessibility and their otherness.[1] These are stories about women and men on the edge, doing things we all fear to those they love the most.

Medea is able to be many things, at once and in succession.[2] She is a daughter and though she betrayed her parents for Jason she misses them. She is by birth a Colchian and regrets leaving her home. She was once a sister, but her brother is dead by her own hand. She misses him too (257). Now—when the play opens—she is both Greek and foreign. She is a wife and loving mother. But she is also σοφή (a "wise woman"): we might call her "a professional," someone both admired and distrusted, whose preoccupations militate against family life. She is already a famous wise woman in Corinth (11, 285). And she has a history that is known to outsiders, something unusual for a mortal woman (though not unique: Clytemnestra was already a famous exemplum in the *Odyssey*; her sister Helen was too, but she was Zeus' daughter and not a mortal woman). Medea may have been a goddess originally. She may even have been a Greek. She is not a monster from the netherworld, not the Mormo (personification, we might say, of the cause of crib death and other sudden fatalities of the young), even if at the end of the drama she acts very much like the Mormo. She is not an Erinys, avenger of wrongful deeds in the family, but she carries out that daimonic function. She is not, *pace* Moreau,[3] "le dragon" or "une bête sauvage, un monstre," nor even "une force élémentaire, une puissance de Chaos," as rhythmically enchanting as these words sound. She is Jason's wife. As surprising as it may seem, she was once his perfect wife (*Medea* 10–4, like Alcestis to Admetus, like Phaedra in Theseus' imagination). She is a mother who loves her children. She is a resident of Corinth who helped the citizens with her expertise in the healing arts (11–2 and scholia, *ad loc.*).

She is able to be the many things a human being is capable of, good and evil and much that is in between; weak and powerful; loving and hating; rational and passionate; rock, lion, god, all of these and none of these. The story she was living in Corinth before the crisis was

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[1] See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b–1454a and Belfiore (2000: esp. 122).

[2] George Gellie (1988) writes, "Medea seems to turn into whatever will ensure that the next thing will happen" (17). This is well but almost too nicely said, and the multiplicity of Medea's essence will be explored more in chapter 3.

[3] Moreau (1994: 198–9). Who has not called her a monster? I too have done so.

simpler. She was the faithful wife, accommodating herself to Jason, though Medea was always active in her marriage. The unheroic side to this story had a predictable ending for Jason, a peaceful life and death with sons and heirs who would keep up his family's cult and his own memory. That, however, was not how he wanted his life to pass.

> εἴη δ' ἔμοιγε μήτε χρυσὸς ἐν δόμοις
> μήτ' Ὀρφέως κάλλιον ὑμνῆσαι μέλος,
> εἰ μὴ 'πίσημος ἡ τύχη γένοιτό μοι. (542–4)

> May I not have gold in my mansions
> nor the talent to sing better than Orpheus
> if my fate is not significant.

He wants his name known. He wants a story: not to be the singer (Orpheus) but the subject of his song.

Medea loved Jason and participated in his story despite the dangers, despite the leap into the unknown. When Jason decided that he no longer desired to be part of his and Medea's story, that he could have a better one on his own, she had to show her hand.

> κοὐκ ἀπομοῦσον τὸ γυναικῶν. (1089)

> Womankind too is not without a song.

Jason has chosen to turn Medea into a useless dependent and reclaim *their* story as *his* story. Creon is determined to cast her out into the void of anonymous homelessness. Only Aigeus offers her a place from which to rebuild herself and recognizes a self in her from which to start, the σοφὴ φρήν ("skilled mind" of line 677). But Medea will not let others tell her story for her.

Because this is a drama taking place and not just being told, the story is their lives. If the children were taken from her to be killed by others (as they are in other versions of the story) then they would not be hers anymore and her story (her life) would come under others' control. By giving her the role of killing them, Euripides has allowed his female protagonist to make this her story and hers alone. He makes her both the singer and the song. In her anticipation of how events will be told, however, she manipulates the lives of the other characters in the same way as they had tried to do to her. The physicality of the children and the other actors whose lives will end or go on makes her obsession with the drama as narrative (as words, 790) more disturbing.

Medea is usually treated as a negative character, viewed with horror, her name synonymous with female filicides everywhere. In the following chapters, along with the damning evidence, I will look at some of the

more positive and mitigating aspects of this particular, multifaceted, fictitious Medea.

Mostly I have tried to come to a fuller appreciation of Medea and the *Medea* by looking at the language of the play. Part of this is lexical work: for example, the words of power associated with Creon (cf. Fartzoff, 1996) that turn out surprisingly to belong to his daughter, or terms of status applied to Medea (cf. Pucci, 1980). I also look at the use and placement of pronouns that indicate an entanglement and severing of lives (cf. Gill, 1996) which in turn leads to the discussions of word order that play so prominent (and perhaps idiosyncratic) a part throughout my study. Word order is tricky in Greek because it is so flexible. "Apart from 'keeping together what belongs together', order serves no function in Greek syntax, as it does in other languages" (Dik, 1995: 5). Even though order does not affect the syntax, this does not mean that word order does not matter. It still has a significant influence on emphasis and ethos. Words affect each other in other than syntactical ways. The placement of words in a line is spatial and temporal like the placement of persons and events on stage and is part of what Kitto called "the art of effective juxtaposition." Perhaps a few examples will illustrate the points I am trying to make.

1. The great Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen translated line 513 of *Medea*, "with a child of his on each arm." The line in Greek is σὺν τέκνοις μόνη μόνοις (more literally, "alone with orphaned [lonely or only] children"). It is clear to me that Cullen is translating not only the words but the word order in which the words for children (τέκνοις . . . μόνοις) and their epithet surround the adjective describing Medea (μόνη). We can see the same phenomenon taken a step further at line 273, λαβοῦσαν δισσὰ σὺν σαυτῇ τέκνα ("taking with you your two children"), where the children (δισσὰ . . . τέκνα) encompass Medea (σὺν σαυτῇ), but the two of them (δισσά) are also locked in her embrace (λαβοῦσαν . . . σὺν σαυτη). Words are interlocked. They almost have to be in Greek. But this may not take away from their power to affect our emotions.

2. In the simple phrase which follows the standard order (or one of them) in Greek (Subject—Object—Verb), σύ με στυγεῖς ("you hate me," 463), Jason shows himself (με) entangled inside Medea's feeling (here, hatred, σύ . . . στυγεῖς) for him. To a certain extent the language makes this necessary, but the effect is still there; σύ is added for needed

emphasis, while με is enclitic and unemphatic. The meter may require this order, but not the placement in the line.[4]

3. Line 620, ὡς πάνθ' ὑπουργεῖν σοί τε καὶ τέκνοις θέλω ("that I wish to help you and the children in every way"), offers another example of Jason's skill in ordering his words into a cozy arrangement in which his good-will and desire to serve his family (ὑπουργεῖν…θέλω) surrounds Medea and the children (σοί τε καὶ τέκνοις). There are many more of these word pictures (e.g. 75–6, 88, 163, 552). In the first line, the Argo (Ἀργοῦς) is separated from its hull (σκάφος) by the words "not to have flown through" (Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος), while in the second the "dark-blue Clashing Rocks" are shut tight together (κυανέας Συμπληγάδας), revising the historical tale, as if the Nurse is looking forward to the shattering of the Argo into its parts to which Medea refers at the end of the play (1387). Words that "go together" are separated or, looked at another way, are joined together by affective words in between, as in 88 (τούσδε γ' εὐνῆς οὕνεκ' οὐ στέργει πατήρ, "because of the marriage bed the father does not love these [children]") where the father and children (τούσδε…πατήρ) are separated by the marriage bed (εὐνῆς οὕνεκ'), confirming the fact that Jason loves (στέργει) the new marriage more than his two sons.

4. Finally, in lines 67–72, Creon's sentence of exile is complex in both syntax and word order as it is conveyed in the report by the servant who uses strategies of delay to make his news more dramatic and to withhold key elements of it for as long as possible.[5]

> ἤκουσά του λέγοντος, οὐ δοκῶν κλύειν,
> πεσσοὺς προσελθών, ἔνθα δὴ παλαίτατοι
> θάσσουσι, σεμνὸν ἀμφὶ Πειρήνης ὕδωρ,
> ὡς τούσδε παῖδας γῆς ἐλᾶν Κορινθίας
> σὺν μητρὶ μέλλοι τῆσδε κοίρανος χθονὸς
> Κρέων. (67–72)

> I heard someone saying, though I was pretending not to listen,
> as I was passing the game tables where the oldest old men

[4] Denniston (1952: 57) writes, "Certainly the metre must have had some influence on the word-order: but, as far as one can see, not much." See Dik (1998: *passim*) for the beginning of a more thorough study of word order in the tragic trimeter.

[5] On artistic self-consciousness and value of variety in Greek word-order, see Dover (1960: 68).

> sit, next to the sacred fountain of Peirene,
> that these children with their mother—well, he is planning
> to banish them from Corinthian territory, the king of this country,
> Creon.

In the text, Creon is saved for the end, preceded by his title. From "I heard," the subject of the sentence to the subject of the indirect statement there are twenty-seven words. Mother and children are separated by "to drive from the land of Corinth." To build up suspense the old man piles up descriptive phrases for three lines, in which he places himself passing by the speaker. Then he places the object ("these children"), the sentence of exile, "with their mother" (as an afterthought?) and finally the subject, in a cunningly crafted arrangement. I hope the cumulative power of examples will gain acceptance for what might be called a pictorial syntax.

CHAPTER ONE

AN IDEAL WOMAN

> No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man.
>
> Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*

The idea of Medea as a perfect woman is disturbing. For the Athenian man of Euripides' time an ideal wife is one who tends her husband's house and slaves and produces heirs. The less talked about she is the better. She makes no arrangements or contracts for herself. She has no property except her dowry. She keeps basically to the house and women's affairs, attending to life's transitions, laying out the dead, perhaps attending births among women in her family, participating in ritual life with other women of the community. Her marriage and dowry are arranged by her father or another male kinsman (her guardian or *kurios*) and she moves into her husband's house where she becomes a fixture at his hearth, a member of his family. Inside this system, there is little scope for personal or intellectual development or autonomy: her mind goes unused, her body often overused. From a twenty-first century perspective such an ideal is a waste of half the human population. Medea has little resemblance to such a woman. She is at least the equal of any man, in intelligence, courage, creativity, and lack of modesty or restraint.

Whether tragedy has a future is in dispute, but no one has ever denied it a past. The story of Medea's marriage is told in the prologue by Medea's aged Nurse and given a new perspective in the first episode by Medea herself. For a decade or so, by the time the Nurse begins her history of her mistress' past, Medea has lived as Jason's wife, borne and reared his children, been in charge of his household and tried to build up his estate and prospects in various ways (both ordinary and bizarre) especially through her relationships with other women (as is displayed in the first episode after the demise of her marriage when she gains the sympathy and support of the chorus). She has lived through the stages of a woman's life from daughter and sister to wife and mother. When the play opens she is no longer a wife. When it closes she is no longer a mother. What she had been and could have been and how much

distortion in all her relationships is caused by the loss of her status as Jason's wife, along with the political implications of this change, is the subject of this chapter.

From Myth to Marriage

> How I wish the Argo's sails had never swept through
> the dark blue Clashing Rocks into the land of the Colchians!
> I wish the pine trees had never fallen
> in the groves of Pelion, cut down to put oars in the hands
> of the heroes who went after the Golden Fleece
> for Pelias. (*Medea* 1–6)

The story Medea's elderly Nurse tells in the prologue starts as a male adventure story and subtly becomes a domestic tragedy. It is, for the space of the prologue and parodos (with a few exceptions), the story of a woman, like all women, tied to her husband, confined to her house and its environs. Medea—one of the many Medeas she has been, is, or could be—breaks this domestic pattern.[1] The traditional heroism of Medea, her "masculinization," has been well and amply discussed by others including herself.[2] She is the one who underscores the analogy of women's and men's complementary functions (marriage is to women what war is to men) and at the same time undercuts the male/female polarity of active and passive roles, by claiming "I would rather stand three times in battle than bear one child" (250–1).[3] Marriage—after these words—can no longer be called passive; women's stay-at-home lives are also fraught with pain and danger of death and the chorus confirms Medea's activism by suggesting that stories would be different if women had a Muse. Elsewhere (explicitly in Medea's first speech to the chorus, but implicitly in her tirade against Jason and in his answer

[1] In fact she breaks numerous patterns, whether real-life roles or story patterns or received myth. For example, the helpful princess is supposed to get left behind at the next stop; Medea keeps going and finally leaves her prince charming behind, a broken man, to go on to her own next adventure.

[2] By Maddalena (1963), Bongie (1977) and Knox (1977), and more recently Galis (1992: 73–80), Foley (1989: 66–71), Bowman (2002: 163–4), and Friedrich (1993: 231–2), who offers a healthy corrective lest we become too enthralled with Medea the *Übermensch*. See also Barlow (1995) and Mastronarde (2002: 19–20, 27, 36) on figurative language.

[3] On this as an insult to the audience (rather than the rallying cry many moderns take it to be), see Griffiths (2006: 75).

to it in the second episode) the importance of marriage as giving women a place in society is stressed. We cannot say that she does her horrific (but all too common) deeds "*just* because of her marriage-bed" or "*just* to get even with Jason" because marriage *is* a woman's social world, usually her only world. Medea, because of her past adventures and the present crumbling of her ties to Jason, is in a unique position to see what this institution means to women.

Medea sees clearly what her place is in Jason's milieu and what has been done to her, not only personally but in the Hellenic system of organizing the world, and she also understands men's aspirations and how they can be fulfilled as well as brought to nothing, but she cannot see far enough ahead to project a positive future for her children, borne and reared with such daring and danger (1029–31). When she does picture her boys growing up, she sees them in the domestic sphere, as husbands (1026–7): even there she regrets their lost future and her part in it.[4] Just before her farewell to her sons (956–7, 969–73) she had sent them to deck out their father's bride in yet another grisly parody of normal domestic arrangements.[5] It is Jason who envisions them as potential allies: "May I see you victorious over my enemies" (920–1). By bringing the children into his masculine sphere, he completes their alienation from their mother. Perhaps Medea has come to see that the children are not really hers, for they belong to him.[6] They become hers alone only after she has killed them. Once they are dead, though Jason tries to recover them even then, they can be withheld from him, but only because by then she has (if only temporarily) removed herself from the world of men's laws. All through the play, Medea sees these children as victims of her enemies or herself.[7] Her status as mother, wife, and woman has thus had a limiting effect. Her husband has become her enemy and therefore his children would grow up to be alien to her, but before that can happen, she uses them in her victory over her own

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[4] A difficult passage: she will not be there to oversee the rituals of their weddings because she will be an exile in a foreign land (1024), but they will be dead before she leaves.

[5] See Rehm's marvelous essay (1989) on the bride becoming her own wedding torch.

[6] See McDonald (2003: 102), "When Medea looks at them [the children] she sees Jason."

[7] McDermott (1987: 159) makes the suggestion that for Medea her sons are, the "physical manifestations of her now hateful union with Jason." This is certainly true of Creon too: it provides his motivation for exiling the children along with their mother.

enemies.[8] In any case Jason's assertion that he will take them back into his new family as acknowledged brothers to his royal sons is part of the process of their alienation from her.[9] She would no longer be part of their story or their lives. Before this, mother and children had been a unit even after the family had ceased to be one. She is said to hate them (36) and we hear her cursing them (112–4), but they are hers in the mind of Creon (70–1, 273, 352–3), perhaps because he does not want to acknowledge them as Jason's.

And yet she loves them too: they are all that she has that is worth sacrificing. The heroic aim of helping friends and harming enemies has never been easy or straightforward:[10] for in order to hurt one's enemies one must often also hurt one's friends, especially when they become one and the same, as they must always do in the unequal domestic sphere (of married life between a man and a woman) where sustained harmony is impossible and possibly undesirable. To hold to immutable ethical laws while human relationships shift and reverse adds violence to the tragedy already inherent in the fading of passions once so strong, whether in the aftermath of war, adventure, or love. When Medea defines herself most explicitly in the context of traditional masculine heroism (807–10), it is only after her brutal decision and the pronouncement that she will kill her children. To her the children now are helpless, not only her own, but everyone's victims. That is a status which she does not accept for herself, though ἀμήχανος ("helpless") is predicated of aspects of her fortunes or passions over and over again (392, 408, 447, 552; cf. 645) in the first (but not the second) half of the play. The only way the children can be safe is if they are dead.

The children are also part of a past that must be rejected, the harvest of a marriage that is gone. When she leaves the confines of her Corinthian home for the last time—already disrupted by Jason's defection—and embarks upon a new adventure, to become a new Medea, the children from her former liaison are not to accompany her. It is to

[8] As Barlow (1995: 39) remarks, "The trouble is that Medea's enemies are partly her family." Very true, but this is the case in most tragedies, and certainly in the best ones. See also Menu (1992: 242–3) on the children as "utilité."

[9] See Just (1989: 272) on Jason's concept of family, "it is part of the structure of larger society, the means by which he must find his place in the public world"; also Shaw (1975: 258–9).

[10] Foley (1989: 83), "Euripides makes a devastating philosophical case against both the shallow modern ethics of Jason and Creon and the heroic ethics of the archaic past."

be a new start and the past must be undone. The past adventure is only a story now that can be told by the Nurse and summarized by Jason. Within the story are many stories told or to be inferred as each visiting character tries to make this his story, but all are subsumed finally by Medea, whose story and action it really is, in the play Euripides has given her. Within her performance there also are other versions, hints of other Medeas she has been or might have become, beginning with Medea the perfect wife.

A Woman like the Rest

Medea as a woman among women[11] is especially prominent in the first half of the play (before the Aigeus episode). She had gone through the stages of becoming a woman: from being a girl passionately in love to a young wife and mother and finally to a woman wronged. And her Nurse, in presenting these facts and feelings, also mixes in other more outré aspects of her mistress' career.

Women's loyalties are always divided and therefore frequently suspect in Greek literature. They are temporary residents in their own homes. A father usually tries to ally his daughter with a "friend" but when that is impossible, he has to fear her husband and her disloyalty to her family of birth. Mythical women who do not betray their fathers or brothers are objects of suspicion in their marital families, lest they avenge a brother or sister's wrong or a child's wrong by harming a husband or son. A woman must always "choose" to leave her family for her husband. The violence of love (whether leading to marriage or ending with seduction or rape) makes the leaving violent. Medea is a pattern-breaker here too: having betrayed her father and native land (by her own admission), she has a hand in destroying her husband's *oikos* ("family, house") as well. In this she and Jason have cooperated, occasionally with success, always with heroic excess.

When Medea presents herself to the chorus, she acknowledges the difference between her situation and theirs. She presents it as a difference

[11] See McDermott (1989: esp. 43–64). On the construction of Medea through a series of shifting perspectives see Sourvinou-Inwood (1997: 254–62). On Medea as everywoman see Rohdich (1968: 47), "Medea ist nicht eine Frau, sondern die Frau überhaupt." See also Stein (2003: 115), who suggests that Medea (in the Deborah Warner production of 2002) is like us and "certainly more than us" and (116) "she, the enchantress, has been reduced to a domestic spouse…"

in degree rather than kind: her plight as a married woman is worse than theirs but it helps define the nature of marriage in patriarchal societies, an enslavement of women, in which women collaborate in their inferior status. Emily McDermott argues that the presentation of Medea as a woman like other women, and especially the scenes of her wavering in her murderous resolve, adds to "the grotesquerie of her crime and the utter horror of her being able to carry it through" (1989: 51). I do not disagree, but I would say that we deceive ourselves if we find Medea's crime alien to the human condition, if we say it is unheard of or that no other parent would do such a thing. Other Greek legends—not to mention the newspapers—tell of both men and women killing their children, whether on purpose or not. As I was reading yet another description of Medea's deed as "the most horrid imaginable,"[12] I thought of the morning's news from Britain (28.x.1997) in which we were informed that a physician, suspecting abuse, videotaped parental visits to thirty-nine hospitalized children. Thirty parents were caught trying to suffocate their children, two poisoning them. One child actually suffered a broken arm while in the hospital. Thirty-two parents were indicted. More recently a mother in Texas admitted to drowning her five children. In the suspicious death or disappearance of a child the parents are always the prime suspects: it would seem that, in matters of domestic crime, the police know more about the human condition than literary critics. What is so puzzling is that every time one of these many filicides is reported, it is greeted with shock as if it had never happened before, which may oddly be an indication of the goodness and optimism of humankind. More global events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have expanded our capacity to think the unthinkable and to realize that love of children is neither constant nor universal. Medea is a woman with other women.

Another surprising fact about Medea which will also increase our horror at her wrongs (both those done to her and those done by her[13]) is the Nurse's description of the might-have-been, the happily ever afterward ending to the story, *the perfect marriage* of Jason and Medea (13–5), as she continues with her tale of regret.

[12] Ohlander (1989: 177) in a work otherwise admirable and enjoyable.

[13] See Knox's famous remark, "The *Medea* is not about woman's rights, but about woman's wrongs, those done to her and by her" (1979: 306).

> And she would not have persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill
> their father and come to live here on Corinthian soil
> with her husband and children, in her exile
> gratifying the citizens of her land of refuge,
> and accommodating herself to Jason in every way. (9–13)

Even to the predominantly male audience, a better wife could hardly be imagined (compliant to her husband, lethal to his enemies).[14] The Nurse praises the stable relationship that gives security to the whole household. *Sôtêria* ("security," 14) is her word for this domestic tranquillity: when there is harmony, everyone is secure; certainly slaves, children, wife. The Nurse's own position is being put forward here. She is somebody. Though a nameless slave of foreign origin, in fact she is endowed by her author with the characteristics of a good Athenian citizen, following the ideal, which she puts in political terms:[15] "nothing in excess." Not a heroic ideal (since "living on terms of equality" with others is anathema to the hero), but useful to the tranquillity of a democratic, egalitarian, society.

She praises her mistress' marriage by saying:

> Herself agreeing with Jason in all things (or: agreeing with Jason himself),
> which is the greatest security
> when a woman does not dispute with her husband. (13–5)

And what about the man? For a moment we are misled. No action of Medea's initiates any disharmony with Jason. At line 13[16] she is the perfect wife. In the next section Nurse emphasizes the disaffection and betrayal of Jason. The Medea Jason wanted her to be would have said *yes* just one more time, but that would have been to betray herself, to accept Creon's daughter as her mistress.

So far the scene-setting prologue has introduced the simultaneous familiarity and alterity that the play is about: family life and the harmonious marriage disrupted by heroic adventures and dynastic murders.

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[14] See Odysseus' words to Nausicaa (*Odyssey* 6.181–5), "For nothing is stronger or better than this, when man and woman, alike in their thoughts, keep their home, much sorrow to their enemies and joy to those kindly disposed to them." On Medea as a typical Greek wife, see Shaw (1975: 258–9).

[15] Using, for example, the expressions "the tyrannical temper" (119); "among equals" (122).

[16] See Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*) on the ambiguities in the phrase πάντα ξυμφέρουσ'.

> It has all gone sour now, affection turned to hatred.
> Jason has cast aside his children and my mistress,
> and now goes to bed in a royal marriage
> with the daughter of Creon who governs this land. (16–9)

Then at line 16 νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα, "now he hates everything." True, the phrase is put impersonally ("all has turned into acrimony"), but primarily it was Jason who became dissatisfied with his marriage and brought on the alienation of Medea's love. After all, Medea had agreed with him in *everything*. But that was not enough for the male adventurer. Καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα, "family affections are sick" (in other, more modern, terms, "the family has become dysfunctional," 16; cf. 871, where Medea reminds Jason of their shared deeds of love, affection and family life). No more *sôtêria* ("security") for them: in the next lines Jason has gone outside the family unit to transact a new marriage, clearly for gain, whether political or monetary or, as Medea suspects (or pretends to suspect, 623–4), sexual.[17]

If the Golden Fleece was to be thought of as Medea's dowry then it is long gone. What Jason gave in return for her help was a promise which he kept as long as it was expedient, meaning that he did not keep it at all. The missing dowry is the socio-political joining of families.[18] This is clearly what Jason misses and needs for *his* security. Jason, presumably, hoped to regain his place in his own family and kingdom by delivering the fleece to Pelias. Medea did have a family and she has protected Jason for all these years through them and the special gifts she inherited from them.[19]

At lines 18–9, Jason has "embedded himself in a *royal* marriage": γάμοις Ἰάσων βασιλικοῖς, or phrased differently "Jason goes to bed with kings": Ἰάσων βασιλικοῖς εὐνάζεται. The word order, with the separation of the noun and adjective, and the adjective put between the subject and verb, indicates Jason's new interests. The Nurse introduces a second Medea after the Medea of the adventures. The past of her

[17] Jason's behavior at the gift-giving makes this unlikely. He doesn't even stay around to see his young wife try on the new outfit. In their one (reported) scene together he sounds more like her father than her new husband, perhaps reflecting the preferred relationship of husband and wife in which the husband is so much older and serves as a mentor to his wife. Medea meets men on terms of equality.

[18] See Visser (1986: 150). On divorce see Cohn-Haft (1995: esp. 14 on the importance of the marriage of families, not just a man and a woman).

[19] See Mueller's fine article (2001: esp. 472, 494) on "reading the gifts," which she calls "biographical objects."

marriage to Jason was an interlude of stability in the chaos of their adventures and exile. Medea has done Jason's dirty work *and* appeased the locals.

The simple fact is this: Jason has *changed his mind*. He may not have changed in any personally meaningful way: he is still on the make, going after the next princess with something to offer him. He has "new gods" (of which Medea will accuse him later, 492–5) because he has new opportunities. Kupris (Aphrodite) saved him before and he counts on her to do so again; to him gods are little more than lucky breaks. He relies on female sexuality and the fact that he looks good in tights, as it were.[20] What does he swear eternal fidelity to? Not to *her* (whichever the current "her" is) but to himself and to his own needs. People are like that, as the male servant (the Paidagogos) says in the prologue (85–8). Jason gave his oath, vowed by his right hand, called on the gods, but since he hardly recognizes the existence of others except insofar as they can serve himself it has been easy to forget those old oaths: this is the *anaideia* ("lack of *aidôs* or respect") of which Medea accuses him (471–2). The gods are not much on his lips—another thing that sets him apart from the heroic man, or in this case, woman—except when he attributes to Eros and Aphrodite (to him, no more than personified emotions or lust) Medea's salvation of him. The goddess helped him once and is, apparently, doing so again, this time to save him from obscurity both economic and political. He is the same. He does not recognize Medea as the same. She does not look so good to him now. She has grown older, has had children, has no influence in Corinth: this last being his first concern. The new princess looks to Jason like the old Medea, useful to him in enhancing his status and taking him to the next step in his career from which Medea is holding him back, but he fails to realize that this is not his exclusive story. Later Jason will talk to the princess (as reported in the messenger speech) as if she were a mini-Medea, urging her to give up her anger and to treat friends as friends (1151–5; cf. 622, where Jason reproaches Medea for "pushing away her loved ones/*philoi*"). He cannot grasp that in doing what he has done he has irreparably corrupted all his relationships of

[20] Cf. lines 945, 1145–6. The importance of tights is impressed upon the young actor by the ghost of John Barrymore in Paul Rudnick's *I Hate Hamlet*, Garden City, NY (1993: 35). In 1972 I had the pleasure of seeing a memorable production of *Medea* at the ancient theatre in Siracusa in which Jason appeared in lovely silver tights, looking good.

philia ("friendship, affection, family ties"). Medea's children are not the friends or family of Creon's daughter. Quite the opposite. In suggesting that they should or could be, he shows himself so far beyond the pale that he is almost unrecognizable as a human being.

> And Medea, in despair, rejected by her husband,
> howls out "the oaths he swore" and calls upon her right hand,
> a potent symbol of fidelity, and invokes the gods
> to witness Jason's treatment of her.
> She won't eat and gives in to her grief,
> washing away all her hours in tears,
> ever since she realized her husband had abandoned her.
> She never looks up or raises her face
> from the ground. She is like a rock or wave of the sea
> when those who love her try to give advice;
> except that sometimes she turns her pale face
> and mourns for her dear father,
> her country, and the home she betrayed
> to come here with this man who now scorns her.
> The poor woman knows from its bitter loss
> what it means to have a homeland. (20–35)

In the present time of the Nurse's speech, Medea—while still inside the house, still confined to her past as Jason's wife—is acting like a woman in love (just a few strokes are needed), reverting to that uncertain time when she moped about longing for him:

> κεῖται δ' ἄσιτος, σῶμ' ὑφεῖσ' ἀλγηδόσιν. (24)
>
> She lies without eating, giving her body over to sufferings.

But the affair is over (as we already know from the previous lines). Time surrounds her tears; time oppresses her; she is *melting* (or pining away) all her time (25, συντήκουσα...χρόνον) into a sameness of misery.[21] We are supposed to feel this familiar pain: the suffocating pain of a young woman abandoned by her lover, abandoned by hope. She cannot eat because food would only sustain her life. She cannot face that bleak, blank future of shame. There is no future: Jason has taken it away (cf. 1073–4). This is how she is spending the time since she found out about his betrayal (26). Two participles (20, 26) frame this section and indicate its political significance: *dishonored* (deprived of her rights, 20), *unjustly treated* (26), after which Nurse describes Medea as

[21] See Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 25) on the oddness of usage here.

having gone into almost a state of autism. She does not look up (27). She is turned in upon herself. She neither sees nor hears (29). She is like a rock (28, than which, what is more self-sufficient, more autistic?), or a wave of the sea (28–9). Both reject comfort; both are potentially hostile to seafarers (of which in Greek tradition Jason was the first), at rest and in motion, bound and boundless, earth and water. Medea is all these things at once.

Medea's greatness and her tragedy is that she is by nature too many things, defying the divisions.[22]

The Nurse has presented a picture of the perfect family with her mistress as the perfect wife. It lasts but an instant. And it is already gone, an illusion now, presented in the context of regret over a lost present. The memory is already revised when Medea offers her first version of her marital history to the chorus. We see not only this personal history but nearly everything in the developing drama (even Jason in his self-presentation and Creon in his) from Medea's point of view (11–5), though not exclusively so.[23] That is, at his first appearance, Jason offers proof of what she has said of him and Creon can be seen as exactly as she describes him after his exit. On the other hand, other characters come into focus fleetingly, but no other perspective is sustained as fully as Medea's is from the beginning, first through her Nurse and thereafter through her own scenic dominance.

Medea has created a home, actually built up the *oikos* ("household") of Jason,[24] by bearing children, by gaining acceptance, if not friendship, from the local families.[25] The point is that we are introduced early and very briefly to a Medea who could be like other women and establish

[22] This blurring of distinctions in Medea's nature has been particularly well-expressed by Hatzichronoglou (1993: 183 and esp. 186), "She is a woman, and yet she acts like a man. She is a barbarian, but she behaves like a Greek. She is slighted and weak and yet she is able to destroy everything. She says she loves, but the power of her hatred comes through with equal intensity. She is human but she possesses powers that go beyond human limits."

[23] The importance of everything being presented from her point of view cannot be over-emphasized. This is what makes *Medea* a subversive play: see Barlow (1995: esp. 39); see also Allan (2002: 45–65). It is true that other sides are expressed and that sympathies shift, but Medea's point of view is not lost sight of.

[24] *Pace* Friedrich (in Sommerstein *et al.*, 1993: 232–3), who asserts that "Medea's *philotimia* has... no grounding in an *oikos*-ethics." I believe that everything she has done up to the action of the play has been done to enhance Jason's *oikos*.

[25] She calls the chorus φίλαι over and over, but they do not address her so intimately. See Schein (1990: 65). They do, however, acknowledge a relationship of φιλία with the household (138, 181, a difficult line, whatever it means).

an *oikos* on a par with others. This egalitarian Medea should be kept in mind when we confront the more imperious unique and tragic person she has become at the end, but also when we witness her face to face with the men.

Competing Family Values: Tyranny v. Equality

Nurse sings (or chants) a little later (119–30) of the excess of the tyrannical spirit and of the benefits of moderation and equality.

> Terrible are the tempers of tyrants,
> who are seldom under control, who have wide power;
> they are hard put to set aside their indignation.
> To get used to living on terms of equality
> is better. I pray to the gods, let it be my fate to grow old
> in security, not among the high and mighty.
> The golden mean, first just to say
> the words should win the prize, to apply it
> is by far the best we mortals can do. But excess
> is never opportune for humans,
> and it brings greater ruin
> when a deity is angry with the house. (119–30)

She may (in the immediate context) be talking about Medea's self-willed temperament but she could equally be speaking of any of the named characters in the play (except Aigeus, for no other reason than because he is not yet part of the story): Jason in his pursuit of a royal marriage; Creon and his daughter in their pursuit of Jason in spite of recognizing him as already *posis* ("husband") of Medea and father of their two children.[26] Not only Creon but everybody accepts the status of Jason and Medea as a genuine marriage. Everyone in the play, that is. Some modern readers have not and it is worthwhile for a moment to consider this question.[27]

Nothing in the play suggests that the relationship between Jason and Medea is less than a marriage. In fact the opposite is indicated again

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[26] In the text it is first presented (70–1) that Creon is exiling *the children* with their mother: an early instance of a Corinthian threat to the children.

[27] Especially Palmer (1951: esp. 49–51), but even Friedrich (1993: 236), Ohlander (1989: 89) and Bowman (2002: 158–63), and many historians. For a more reasonable approach see Easterling's "heroic vagueness" (in Pelling, 1997: 25–6) according to which an issue can be glossed over and made prominent in the same play; see Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 19). Ogden (1996: 194–7) also finds Jason's argument unconvincing.

and again. Aigeus,[28] the Athenian representative,[29] who invites Medea to be his Aspasia,[30] is duly startled by Jason's defection:

> Surely he hasn't had the gall to do this utterly disgraceful deed? (695)
> It is definitely excusable for you to be upset. (703)
> (on the exile) And Jason permits it. I don't approve of that. (707)

The chorus of ordinary citizen women are more than sympathetic to Medea and make no objection to a supposed irregular marital status on her part. The critics who find excuses for Jason because Medea is not really his legal wife or because the children are bastards (as they would be by fifth-century Athenian statutes) are certainly laying too much stress on what is a minor issue (if an issue in the play at all).[31] If Euripides had wanted this to be a theme he would have given a hint of it (as he does in *Hippolytus*). The only intimation of such a kind is Medea's gibe (at 591–2) that a foreign marriage was not respectable enough for Jason as he grew older and would not bring him the good repute he is so concerned about. But more important than this is Medea's insistence that she would have found his decision to remarry pardonable (so she says; whether she really would have is outside the drama, since the drama is about filicide) if there had been no children (489–91), but not in this case because the marriage has been fruitful (490, παίδων γεγώτων) to which Jason says, "the children already born are enough and I find no fault with them" (558, οὐδὲ μέμφομαι). If Jason had considered them bastards, he would hardly have used these exact words. Aigeus is so concerned with his own heirlessness that he does not mention Medea's children at all, neither does she—a very significant omission in my opinion—in that scene. By then Medea, the perfect wife, has ceased to exist in fact and can only be recalled to life as a role in her deception of Jason (in the fourth episode).

This is not fifth-century Athens. This is Corinth in the heroic age. Jason is a foreigner too. It is not the continuation of his line that he

[28] "As elsewhere, Euripides makes intelligent use of an outsider to establish an independent moral attitude to the situation," Vickers (1973: 284).

[29] Ohlander (1989: 106) charmingly compares his entrance to the arrival on stage of George Washington or Abe Lincoln.

[30] This is not to imply that I see a relationship between Medea and Aspasia (see Konishi, 1986, answered by Wilkins, 1987). But at least the life and reputation of Aspasia mean that Euripides' audience was acquainted by hearsay with a woman as gifted as Medea.

[31] The plight of women and especially of foreign women is a concern in the play, and sympathy is with Medea throughout the first half of the play.

is worried about (until the very end of the play). He already has that. His rushing to save the children after the murders in the palace shows his renewed preoccupation with his *oikos*. The children are perfectly acceptable heirs, suddenly more valuable to him in his final scene after his chance of being king and having royal sons is lost. Throughout his career he has wanted his house to be the royal house: this expectation was deceived once when Pelias usurped the throne he thought was his, and then when he still kept it even after Jason's return from his quest with the Golden Fleece, and a third time when it did not come to him after the demise of Pelias. Thus the Nurse's words quoted above about the advantage of equality and the perils associated with the tyrannical disposition could be seen to apply to him, as, by definition, they do to the *turannoi* ("royals") themselves.[32] Though Creon says of himself (348), "my temperament is in no way tyrannical," his mood is imperative, his manner imperious. And like all tyrants he is fearful and distrusting. His sentence of exile is arbitrary and personal.[33] And his final words to Medea are "you will die: a truer word has never been spoken" (354).[34]

Jason is satisfied with the children he has fathered by Medea, but not with his lot as an ordinary householder with few slaves and a modest *modus vivendi*. He needs more: he wants to be *king*. Royal power is the one thing Medea cannot give him. This puts him on the side of the *turannoi* in Nurse's generalization. If the democratic audience is concerned about the socio-political ramifications of the play for contemporary Athens, surely they would be concerned about this: Jason's tyrannical ambitions are nipped in the bud by Medea. The words (42) καὶ τύραννον[35]... κτάνῃ ("and kill the king") may not have been shocking to the Athenian audience who heroized Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the two men who killed the tyrant (τὸν τύραννον κτανέτην) as a prelude to making Athens ἰσόνομος ("where all have equal rights") as the old

[32] See Fartzoff (1996: 153–5) on the frequency of the use of the word τύραννος and below, chapter 5 on the politics of the *Medea*.

[33] A characteristic of tyrants is that they make their own laws. See Fartzoff (1996: 158, 162).

[34] Bracketing 355–6 (with Nauck and Diggle). The omitted sentence somewhat softens Creon's last speech, because it shows him trying to comfort himself with what is probable in spite of his uneasiness.

[35] It is unclear to whom τύραννον refers. One scholiast takes it to be feminine, but the others as referring to Creon. The reading Diggle (1984: *ad loc.*, after Hermann) prefers is the plural τυράννους.

but not quite accurate drinking song goes (Athenaeus, 15.695a). Clearly killing the tyrant in itself is not horrifying. But it *is* a man's work to thrust the whetted sword through the liver (40; cf. 393–4), even one's own. Women have other ways (384–5).

Jason has not fallen victim to *erôs* ("sexual love") the tyrant, but, like Pausanias the Lakedaimonian, to love of tyranny, as Medea reports to Aigeus (698, 700).[36] This is not to say that there is nothing in the drama about the plight of women and, especially, foreign women and their children, but it is not the central theme of the play. Both Jason and Medea would be metics in Athens if they lived there in the fifth century. Many important heroic age people are either illegitimate or "mixed" or both. Theseus himself is a bastard and his story touches upon this one, since his conception is to take place in Trozen (between the Aigeus-scene and his father's return to Athens to be welcomed home by Medea). Hippolytus, though a bastard and of mixed Hellenic/Other (Amazon, in his case) parentage, is much loved and lamented by the citizens. The Euripidean tragedy that bears his name treats the theme of bastardom but, though he is not his father's heir, there is no thought of his being less of a man or less of a Greek because of his mixed ethnicity. The mother of the legitimate heirs is Cretan. In the *Andromache*, the heroine's child by Neoptolemus, himself a bastard, is the only one left to carry on the line of Peleus. It cannot be the issue here. Jason does not have this excuse. In fact the real danger to the status of the children is that if Jason should have royal children by the princess, the present children, if integrated into the family of the young princes, would become something like Teucer to Ajax in their father Telamon's eyes.[37] As his only children they are as legitimate as many heroes' children until there are (here, only potentially) others by a bride with more status (ridiculous though the thought is that this granddaughter of Sisyphus should have more status than Medea, granddaughter of

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[36] This is not to imply that Euripides is referring directly to Pausanias, but that the audience would recognize the type: a man with ambitions to marry power. They also have the example of Menelaus, another man whose power comes from a woman. Jason's elation at his good fortune in marrying the king's daughter makes him sound a bit like the Oedipus of Sophocles. See also McDonald (1992: 119).

[37] McGlew (1993: 164) suggests that they would be attendants of their royal brothers as in the *Iliad*. "Jason presumably had something similar in mind for his children by Medea, when he tried to persuade her that his new marriage served their common interests." But it is the (potential) existence of *royal* brothers which reduces the status of these children.

the Sun).[38] That is, the presence of royal brothers is the only thing that would reduce the status of Medea's children and usurp their place in Jason's family. We notice that Medea's references to her own ancestry start to come after Creon's insults (406). The inference may be drawn that the child promised by Medea to Aigeus, in the absence of other children, could have been the heir. If the audience is expected to be aware of Medea's future in Athens (and they must be to some extent), this adds a further tragic note to her story.[39] Indeed her attempt on Theseus' life may be seen as part of her ongoing battle to maintain the status of her children. Yes, she is brutal, excessive, repulsive even, but that is the nature of tragedies: they are not often about people who end successfully—and the best ones, as Aristotle knew, have always been about terrible deeds perpetrated within the family. It must be credited to the courage of Euripides that he tells this story from the point of view of Medea, already known to the audience as the woman who made an attempt on Theseus' life, and to the playwright's genius that he maintains sympathy for Medea for so long.

To return to the passage under discussion, Nurse's song (119–30): this ambiguity of reference (of the word τυράννων, 119: referring to Medea in the immediate context, but also to Creon and his daughter, and to Jason) gives added force to Nurse's words about equality. As other tyrannical tempers are annihilated or neutralized only Medea's is left, ruled by her ὀργή ("anger," 121), θυμός ("heroic spirit," 108, 1056, 1079), αὐθαδία ("wilfulness," 1028, 621).[40] Since being a Hellene is cultural rather than ethnic and Medea is presented as no less Greek[41] than anyone else in the play and as like other Greek heroes,[42] this preoccupation with her and her children's ethnicity betrays, perhaps, a modern obsession.[43]

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[38] On the significance of the family of Creusa, Creon, Sisyphus, and the whole family of Aeolus, see Holland (2003: 255 ff.).

[39] See Mills (1997: 229), "Medea's only role in Athenian mythology is her failed attempt to destroy the national hero." See also Gantz (1993: 255) on Attic vase paintings of Medea's attempt to poison Theseus that attest that the legend was known in the fifth century.

[40] See Friedrich (1993: esp. 225–9) and Fartzoff (1996: esp. 166–8).

[41] On Medea's use of the language of the *polis* see Lloyd (2006: 115 ff.); on Medea assimilating Greek values see Rehm (2003: 62–3).

[42] See Knox (1977: esp. 301), Friedrich (1993: 222–4); Mastronarde (2002: 23–4).

[43] Both Jason and Medea use the word βάρβαρος. Medea (256) claims that she was carried off as booty from a "non-Greek" land; but this is to arouse sympathy in the chorus. She has made them aware of what they, as women, share in common

Meanwhile, Medea, the helpful princess[44] who betrayed, abandoned, and destroyed her family home, has surprisingly settled down in Corinth, breaking the story pattern that the princess is left behind while the hero travels on. She is a home-destroyer[45] but she is also an *oikos*-builder. Everything she did, everything they did together, was for Jason and the establishing of his *oikos*, and not for selfish individualism, at least not on her part.[46] Jason's quest has been for two things: a story and a kingdom, which helps explain Medea's relationship to kings. Medea does everything to benefit and enhance his *oikos*, including robbing her own father (of his treasure and of his heirs). Unfortunately Medea has had to play both roles in the family, raising their story from adventure to tragedy. If Jason, the hero, had killed Medea's brother in his pursuit of glory and the Golden Fleece there would have been few raised eyebrows. In some versions, in fact, the lad is killed while pursuing the fugitive lovers/thieves. But Euripides has Medea herself kill her brother (at the hearth as we find out, significantly, *later*, 1335) for a number of reasons:

– She is an *oikos*-destroyer (as well as an *oikos*-builder), using children to destroy their fathers: first robbing her father of her brother and herself, then causing the death of Pelias through the agency of his daughters, next killing Creon by his daughter Glauke, finally destroying Jason's future by sacrificing her own children. Where are the mothers? Is it of any significance that Medea is the only mother (her own mother is mentioned, but only because she is not there; later the chorus uses the tragedy of Ino as a parallel) in the play? Is it significant that the marriage of Jason and Medea is the only successful marriage mentioned in the text? Creon seems to be

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with her and then turns to the differences (248). Similarly, Jason (536) claims as one of his benefits to her that he has brought her to Greece where she lives under the rule of law and has had the opportunity to become famous, as if non-Greeks had no traditional praise poetry. He may show a cultural bias, but not yet extreme animosity to other ways. Later in the same episode, however, Medea accuses him of being dissatisfied with his marriage to her because she is foreign (591). And at the end Jason does at last draw the conclusion that she performed her savage acts because she is a βάρβαρος, voicing the Hellene-foreigner polarity (1330–1; cf. 1339–43). For another view see Hall (1989: 200–3).

[44] On the "helpful princess" motif, see Lieberman (1987: 185–200) and de Luce (1997: 25–37).

[45] Friedrich (1993: 233); Segal (1996: 32).

[46] *Pace* Friedrich (1993), whose comments on the theme of Medea ἄπολις are much to be admired, but they are only part of it.

alone; no wife is mentioned, no mother for Creusa/Glauke. Most likely he is a widower. Aigeus is childless. Jason's second marriage is to be fruitless.

– She has sacrificed everything for Jason and he cannot simply walk away.[47] He can never be free of her. She has broken from her family more operatically than other brides.
– She is *apolis* ("without a city"), but also *polupolis* ("of many cities"): at each new place she builds a new family and is accepted by the community for a time. Soon she will arrive in Athens where she will live with Aigeus for nearly two decades. There is not much more that a woman can do unless she is to live on her own like Circe, Medea's antisocial aunt.

Medea in her Marriage

The adventuring couple arrives in Iolcus to set up housekeeping and to raise a family. Again, if Jason had killed the usurper, in spite of the avuncular tie, how different would it have been from what Orestes did to Aegisthus? In the Orestes-Electra plays that killing of a kinsman always pales (except, perhaps, in Sophocles' *Electra*) beside the enormity of the matricide. But Jason has done next to nothing for himself (until now), nor for their *oikos*. Now he has destroyed it. In their first scene together Medea takes even the heroic legend away from him: she killed the serpent and held up the beacon of salvation. He is nothing now, the vilest of the vile (παγκάκιστος, 465), a man without *aidôs* ("respect," 472), who betrays his friends and leaves his family homeless, though he believes in—insofar as his words, being marked as a speech (522) not only of an orator[48] but of a sailor as well (523–5, doubling the artifice) indicate an ethos—the subordinate position of women.

For three lines (13–5) their marriage was a perfect union, Medea accommodating herself to Jason in all things.[49] In hindsight Medea will talk about women's sorry second class status in marriage, buying a husband at great cost, enjoying no freedom of movement, being forced

[47] See Gill (1996: esp. 159–62).
[48] "Jason's speech is indeed the outstanding example in Euripides of rhetoric being used to promote the weaker case," Lloyd (1992: 43).
[49] Was she, then, (like *Bewitched*'s Samantha) a witch stifling her powers and trying to be like everybody else? She shows a benign side in Corinth with the citizen families.

to depend on a man (and hers turns out to be the world's worst). But that comes later.

The marriage of Jason and Medea almost reaching the Homeric ideal of like-minded husband and wife (*Odyssey* 6.181–5) was an illusion all along: there was no equality (as Medea sees in hindsight), no shared world view. Jason, taking advantage of a man's greater mobility, went out and negotiated for a new wife. Medea's agreement and her help are not asked for now. When Nurse says her first words to the chorus, οὐκ εἰσὶ δόμοι ("there is no house", 139), she is not exaggerating. Throughout her short stage life she implies an ideal or ideology of married life and of the family: that it is complete only when husband, wife, and children are harmonious and secure.

> φροῦδα τάδ' ἤδη. (139)
>
> It's all gone now.

Had Medea believed in this ideal at one time? One word says "yes," ξυμφέρουσ' (obliging, 13).[50] But now no more. With the hindsight of her ordinary, human intelligence (she says implicitly that she is not a seer, but rather, like other women, has had to guess whether her mate would turn out to be a scoundrel or not, 238–40), Medea puts everything in perspective. This she does in her major statement[51] to the chorus in which she makes herself out to be the most wronged of wronged women, all women being wronged; the ideal has become not the harmonious marriage, but that in which the husband bears the yoke without force (242, applied by or to him?),[52] that is, the best of a bad situation. How is a young girl to know such things (239)? Now the husband has become a master on whom the woman must depend. At marriage a woman's status changes from free to slave. The acquisition of a husband has become an *agôn* (a contest or battle, 235): but there are no rules except that it is unfairly set up in the man's favor because

[50] I prefer αὐτή at the beginning of the line, balancing 'Ιάσονι at the end and joining in the ἦθος of the perfect marriage. On the other hand the complete agreement to *his* will is better maintained by Diggle's αὐτῷ…'Ιάσονι, with him encompassing her ongoing actions and *êthos*.

[51] This speech is difficult, but it works: the chorus comes over to Medea's side. See Friis-Johansen (1959: 148), "Medea's person determines the whole structure of the reflection and gives it a turn which, if we are thinking only in general terms, can hardly be called logical." Also Buxton (1982: 156–8); Williamson (1990: 18–9); Gould (in Silk, 1996: 229–31).

[52] See Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*).

he has a life outside the house and can even divorce without scandal.[53] It is a contest of the most serious kind (μέγιστος, 235) because the only escape is death. This is how it looks to her now, though, as she will later admit, at the time of her elopement she was πρόθυμος μᾶλλον ἢ σοφωτέρα (485, "more eager than prudent"), when she paid so high a price for her husband. In this major speech she sees that she was wrong. It hardly matters that she is dissembling here,[54] omitting her passion and the active role she played in the choice of Jason as her husband. The fact remains: women are unequal in marriage. Their lives are in a perilous state if the husband has no *aidôs*.

As a transition from the general fate of women to her particular case she makes her heroic, outrageous, defiant, and gender-bending admission about war and childbirth (250–1).[55] Of course Medea has never actually been to war, but she has done what is usually left for male heroes to do: she has slain a dragon and killed a usurping king. She has played both roles in her partnership and in the legend.

In the first episode Medea subverts her nurse's picture. The lines of the Nurse (11–5) indicate Medea's life for the few years (she is still young enough to be addressed as νύμφα, 150) between the flight from Colchis and the recent wedding of Jason and Glauke. The Nurse has attested to their harmony. The chorus is a witness to her social virtues: testimony to the strength of Medea and her control of the plot. These were the years between her adventures with magic or mystery. In subordinating herself to Jason she let him (and herself) forget who she was and what had passed between them, the past they shared which bound them together for life. Did they both forget her special talents? In submitting to the unworthy Jason she has betrayed herself. The might-have-been of the perfect marriage is one more ambiguity. Nurse praises it, but Medea shows it to be a self-contradiction, but only after the demise of her own marriage.

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[53] On the ease with which a man might divorce and the difficulty a woman had in leaving her husband, see Cohn-Haft (1995: 11–4). Jason did not have to face family enmity which made divorce more rare in Athens than its ease might lead us to suspect.

[54] See Lloyd (2006: 119–20) on the need for and prevalence of "societal duplicity" in Greek political discourse.

[55] On Medea's adoption of the warrior ethos, Blundell (1995: 174–5) writes, "Medea's transgression of the sexual boundary involves adherence to a code of public morality which has horrific results when transported into the private sphere of existence." True, but the intrusion of the warrior ethic into private life generally is disastrous. See also Rehm (2003: 54–5).

Now she thinks about a man's greater freedom in marriage (244–5). If he is bored he can go outside and not only to a friend, obviously (246, which is with good reason deleted by many editors). Jason has done just that. Medea, at the beginning, happy to be a woman (and to do the man's work as well) here repudiates her feminine side. Better to be a man altogether. It is quite a remarkable thing for a man to have written for another man[56] (dressed as a woman) to proclaim to an audience of men and women (as Henderson concludes), but in which the men were more equal than the women. And in spite of the many reversals and the deep questioning of the dominant order in the play they will remain so when they leave the theatre. A playwright is not a dictator and his message is subject to many interpretations. He questions but does not necessarily answer. That Medea is so often not called a hero, and the *Medea* so often denied tragic status may be largely attributable to the gender of the protagonist and the gender of most of the past critics.

Medea has made the comparison between childbirth and war and she chooses war. What else is she saying?

– War is easier. It does (or did) eventually come to an end or temporary cessation.
– She would rather kill than give birth.
– She finds the self-importance of men's military mentality risible.

Medea cannot be a hero because she is a woman. But the situation is worse than that. By thrusting her and their children aside and by saying that he does not need any more children (557–8) at least by her (563–5), Jason has denied her even her value as a woman. After producing two sons, there is no more reason for Medea to exist. Anything else he may say about her being well known and living in Greece is just empty words.

When the play opens she is no longer a wife, though she still has a husband. In the course of the play she uses the fact that she is a woman to eradicate what is most womanly about herself, her motherhood and love for her children. And at the same time she will prepare herself to reincarnate this motherliness in a new *oikos*.

Because marriage is everything to a woman (228), Jason's betrayal has turned Medea into nothing. Suicidal urges flit through her mind

[56] See Hatzichronoglou (1985: 170).

(225–7). As a foreigner with no family (here or anywhere else), being *aoikos* ("homeless, without family") means that she is also *apolis* ("without a city, stateless," cf. 255), or at least her statelessness becomes crucial now. Her *oikos* with Iason had been part of the *polis*. Her relationship with the citizens shows this. Without him she is fast on her way to becoming the Euripidean heroine "à l'alpha-privatif":[57] husbandless, homeless, cityless. Since a woman's whole life is her marriage, the coda to Medea's speech,

> For a woman in other ways is full of fear
> and a coward when it comes to facing deeds of valor and blood,
> but when she is wronged in her marriage
> there is no other mind more ruthless (263–6),

is not so surprising. It is part of her attempt to make herself like other women, and to do so she includes herself in this stereotypical view of them, so that these remarks should be taken as part of her persuasive speech to the chorus and not as outside it. Can we fault Euripides or Medea for articulating the stereotype and then shattering it?[58] Unlike Medea, women generally do not "look at the steel" or perform "other deeds of valor" (since these by definition are done on the field of battle), but all must defend their marriages. Only a man, whose turf encompasses both *oikos* and *polis*, could belittle women to the extent that Jason does, could demean them by subordinating them to the single role of childbearing and then demean that role by saying that it is all they care about; suggesting procreation could be done better another way; most of all by, as it were, throwing away the children with whom and for whom a man forms an *oikos* and assures his status in life and after death, as not worthy of him or his *oikos* because they are not royal. But they *are* royal, being grandsons of the Colchian king and of divine blood. They are not royal in Corinth and that is all that counts with Jason now.[59]

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[57] Menu's apt term (1996: 121).

[58] On stereotypes in *Medea* see Barlow's excellent piece (1989: 158–71). See also Gellie (1988: 15). Lawrence (1997: 52) suggests that Euripides has Medea stereotype women as "an escape hatch to those who would dissociate themselves from Medea." See Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 263) for various possibilities of understanding these trouble-some lines.

[59] In another version of the story Medea was the ruler of Corinth (see *Scholia* to line 9).

If marriage is all women care about, it is because it is all they have. Men like Jason have made the categories and have defined women into a corner with the simplistic and tyrannical perfection of a syllogism. A woman, Medea at least, has a more complex and sophisticated logic. And she has a wider scope than other women, wider even than most men. She has a history and she has friends (both ordinary and important ones) outside her *oikos*.

> Love (ἔρως) coming on too strong
> does not give glory or virtue (ἀρετή)
> to men. But if Kypris comes in moderation,
> no other goddess is so gracious (εὔχαρις).
> Never, oh goddess, may you let fly at me an inescapable arrow
> from your golden bow, drenching it in desire.
>
> But let soundness of mind love me,
> the finest gift of the gods.
> Never may dreaded Kypris hit me with quarrelsome angers
> and insatiable strife,
> after stinging the heart for another bed,[60]
> but honoring a warless match, may she wisely discern
> the loves of women.[61] (628–41)

The women of the chorus, in spite of being wives, still have families and friends. They are part of a community of *oikoi* that is stable and will continue to exist after the king is killed. Even so they pray for less *erôs* in their lives (627 ff.), seeing how powerful it has been in Medea's case, how it has caused her to lose her *polis* at one end of her career and her home at the other. They seem to be implying, moreover, that not only Medea but Jason, too, is a victim of immoderate love that brings neither good repute nor goodness to men. Of course Medea has not brought on the disputatious words they sing of (637, though she participates in them) nor has she felt any overwhelming desire for another man. Let there be less *erôs* in a marriage (less than there was for Medea when she ran off with Jason), but enough, since no other goddess than Kupris is so εὔχαρις ("gracious"): there must be some reciprocal pleasure or the system would break down altogether. If *erôs*, as Friedrich suggests (285), has destroyed Medea's *aretê* (which he aptly translates "civic virtue"), it has also destroyed Jason's. Jason, whether

[60] On this difficult line, see Meridor (1986: 95–100).

[61] "Wisely may the goddess of love judge women's marriages, respecting those without strife..." (after Page, 1938: *ad loc.*).

for love of the new bride (as Medea implies, but may not altogether believe) or for security[62] or for royal power, or for all three, has broken a most sacred tie which is one of the foundations of political life, the bond on which the *oikos* is founded. And he has broken his oath to Medea which though extraneous to the marriage rite, is equally serious. These things he has done to enhance his *oikos*, yes, but so that his *oikos* will be greater than those of other citizens. He has broken faith because he has fallen in love with tyranny, which early in the play Nurse has set up as inimical to egalitarian moderation. It is Jason's overstepping (his *pleonexia*, "wanting more than one's share") that has put his family into the ultimate danger of being homeless exiles without the civilizing protection of the *polis*. If he had just married a rich local girl, her father would not have had the authority to exile Medea and the children. His royal ambition has turned his present and former marriages into public events subject to public policy (or what passes for public policy in a tyranny). Here as often the tragedy centers on the intrusion of the public into the private sphere and of the private into the public realm. Creon himself sets his priorities wrong, putting his family first, a figure drawn in polar opposition to his Theban namesake in *Antigone*, who sacrifices his family to policy, but more like the Creon of *Phoenissae*, so often criticized for putting his son ahead of the state. Either way the result is tragic. In fact, this Creon exiles Medea not for political reasons or because she is a criminal or "undesirable alien" but because of personal hostility (on both sides) and paranoia (his alone). He has to exile her because she and her children (Jason's children) are living proof that he recognizes her as the wife of Jason.

By the end of the second episode there is no marriage in this house and no desire for one. It is almost as if the second episode were a kind of flashback (similar to the strategy in the first book of the *Iliad*, where the taking of Helen is repeated in the quarrel scene between Achilles and Agamemnon and the taking of Achilles' war bride) to the confrontation that would have happened when Medea first learned of Jason's betrayal. It is presented *second* because Jason's stature needs to be diminished (for those in the audience who might reflexively, unreflectingly side with him) by the sentence of exile delivered to his wife and children before we even see him.

[62] See Sale (1977: 13–34, esp. 14) on the various directions of Jason's quest for fixity.

In demeaning Medea he demeans himself. Jason wishes away not just sex but the whole reproductive process, the whole "race of women" (θῆλυ γένος, 574) as nothing but a bane to humanity (that is *men*) and indeed the only one (575), as if he were the virgin Hippolytus, another denier of sex, but at least an adolescent, whose mother is dead and whose father is absent most of the time. The laugh should be (and eventually is, mirthlessly) on him because without women Jason is nothing. His exploits with Medea have given him not only children. Though he implies that procreation is the only thing women are useful for, in truth without her he would have no fame as a hero, no prospects, not even life itself. He would be a dead, failed adventurer. She saved his skin. Without the women in his life Jason has no uniqueness. What makes Jason in Corinth so upwardly mobile (besides the fact that he is appealing to women, cf. 945) is the uniqueness of his relationship with Creon's daughter. Too bad for him he does not seem to be aware that monogamy is the Greek way or that Medea is not the weak, submissive type he wishes for. Their time as the ideal couple has, perhaps, diminished his memory. The close alliance he seeks with the royal family is only attainable through marriage. Other warrior-aged men might be "spear-friends" to the king (see Aigeus' epithet for Pittheus, 687), doubtless a good thing to be, but not nearly so advantageous economically or politically. Only the son-in-law gets to live in the royal palace and have expectations of one day being king. As at Colchis, Jason takes the king's most valued possession (his daughter, 329), but this time his aim is to be put on an equal footing with the royal family.

By depriving Jason of both his brides and of his two and only sons, Medea shows that she understands, accepts, and uses the role that he has assigned to her. Jason had briefly tried to appropriate this parental role, by claiming the children as his own, while at the same time rejecting them.

At the end of the second episode and second stasimon Medea is still waiting for a tower of defense (390). Aigeus enters with a friendly "hello." No need here to go through again whether the scene is a trainwreck (with Kitto and Aristotle), an integral part of the drama, or so thematically well-integrated that it seems to be.[63] The play presents

[63] Collinge (1950: 46) calls the Aigeus scene "a happening not out of the blue" attributable to Medea's hypnotic effect; see on this scene Gredley (1987: 31–2); Kovacs (1993: 49, 58); Worthington (1990: 503–5); Browne (1956: 76–7); Vickers (1973: 287).

three fathers: Creon, a good father[64] but a bad man and a bad king; Jason, a bad father, a bad man, and a failed aspirant to kingship; Aigeus, grandfather of his country (but not yet), a good man, a good king (perhaps). He puts his country's security above giving additional help to Medea.[65] How good a person is Aigeus?[66] It is established that he is married. Like the Athenians in the original audience who knew the story, we know that he will slip off with Pittheus' daughter, not a serious failing for a heroic age (or even classical period) man, but he *will* disobey the oracle and as the common story goes will meet his death because of his misbegotten son's inattention. By the end of the play we know that Medea intends to cohabit with him.[67] Yet Medea trusts him to keep his oath and we must feel that she is right; he keeps it until Medea threatens his son (but that comes years after the present tragedy is over). He is the πύργος ἀσφαλής (the "tower of strength," "safe bulwark," 390). The arrival of Aigeus shows Medea taking control of the plot. She had, hopefully but without certainty, voiced her need in the first episode, forecasting the coming event. Her need and dramatic necessity are one.

Aigeus, the best man in the story, shows up Jason's vileness all the more. The father is supposed to be the mighty fortress for his sons, as Alcestis says of Admetus (*Alcestis* 301). The man of the family is the tower of strength; the tower is also where the women are confined (*LSJ* s.v. πύργος). Creon and Aigeus, a loving father and a man who will do anything to become a father, scenically surround Jason, who has deserted his children for other, future, children who will be more useful to him. Jason even denies his wife and children the protection any ordinary man would give to his dependants. His betrayal is absolute (76–7). He is the first man to come on stage after Medea says she will wait a little bit for a safe tower. With her we wait. But Jason enters as if he were in the middle of their latest argument.

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[64] Maybe not even a good father, since he does not honor the institution of marriage in encumbering his daughter with irregular kin: stepchildren and a step-wife.

[65] There are better reasons than the explicit statement of Aigeus. Ohlander (1989: 111–5) is particularly apt on this point: Aigeus' refusal of transportation creates suspense and maybe even is a case of false foreshadowing, creating in the audience a doubt about the success of Medea's escape plan. Of course it also sets up the stunning use of the μηχανή. See also Worthington (1990: esp. 504–5).

[66] On Aigeus' ulterior motives see Dunkle (1960: 98); Browne (1952: 76); on Aigeus as part of the theological design see Kovacs (1993: 49–52).

[67] See Sfyroeras (1995: 126).

His loyalties have changed and it will not do to say that his *philotimia* ("ambition") is grounded primarily in the honor of his *oikos*[68] because he has abandoned his *oikos*. It will not do to say that the children are bastards and therefore not his responsibility because they are his when he needs them.

> You did it all for your marriage?
> Do you think this is a minor trouble for a woman?
> Yes, if she is virtuous. (1367–9)

Medea in her infamous analogy and choice of war over marriage and motherhood has made it clear that she understands the structures/ideology of her (adopted) culture quite as well as any literary theorist. In war men will sacrifice anything: their marriages, their daughters, their sons, themselves. Even in sacred Athens a daughter of Erechtheus was sacrificed and the other daughters killed themselves. Their mother's family was obliterated.[69] I have yet to read a critic who calls Agamemnon's murder of his daughter "the most horrendous crime imaginable." Or a crime which dehumanizes him or robs him of his manhood.

"If she is a good (σώφρων) woman," says Jason (1369). It is almost impossible to be a good woman. Jason means that she should be the sort of woman Medea was in Corinth before Jason repudiated her. A woman should be like Pericles' ideal (rather than historical) woman, not spoken of among men. Even Jason does not accept that obscurity for himself or his wife (542–4). Medea is well known (according to Jason) because she lives in Greece. This helps her with Aigeus but not with Creon. One reason Aigeus' treatment of her differs from Creon's is that Aigeus needs something and he thinks he can get it from her. A man does not need a reputation as a good father and husband. He needs a reputation for hurting his enemies and helping his friends. With that he maintains his integrity.

A woman is good if she is willing to be subservient to her father, her husband, her sons; to allow her life to be destroyed or negated by men; to have no name. To be good Medea is expected to accept being rendered homeless and stateless, to rear her sons to be powerful over

[68] As Friedrich does (1993: 232).
[69] See Cropp's notes to *Erechtheus* (in Collard, Cropp, and Lee, 1995: 151–5).

Jason's enemies, that is, in the particular case, to turn them into her own enemies.

Medea in letting herself be subservient to Jason has betrayed her own heroic temper. Like the Knoxian existentialist hero's, Medea's first loyalty must be to herself. But a woman cannot be a hero, cannot live by the peculiar truth of the heroic code because a woman has no integrity. She is a man's dependant.

By making her manless, Jason has freed her from that dependency. Little by little in the play we learn what this means. The vaunted rule of law, the traditional relationships of decency and justice are denied women. Creon rejects the suppliant, threatens her with violence and death. Jason denies her the protection she should have from him as his wife. He will give her some money and send her to his friends. And what does that mean? Think of Admetus' consternation over what to do with the new woman (really his late wife returned from the grave) in his house, given to him by his friend (*Alcestis* 1049–56), and of the status which Medea will have in Aigeus' house.

Are women naturally savage? Is Euripides just telling one more lie about women? Or is it something more than this? Can he be representing the savage power of the oppressed? "The abuse of power comes as no surprise" (in the luminous words of the artist Jenny Holzer). Why do we fear people with no rights, the poor, the homeless, the disenfranchised, the marginalized? Because they are dangerous? Or because we know they should be?

Laws, customs, traditions do not apply to Medea. By the end of her first scene with Jason even their shared history has been denied by him. Her last value as woman and child-bearer is ridiculed. She came to Corinth as a woman, wife, and mother. Though an exile or resident alien she had status in Jason's house, recognized by all the citizens as his wife and the mistress of his house and slaves. Creon renders her homeless. But it is Jason who makes her see that the role of woman, wife, and mother is nothing. Women need not exist at all (565, 573). This is a bad joke, even in comedy.

From *nothing* Medea forms herself. She assumes power because finally even the distinctions no longer apply to her. Jason's defection is more serious than it looks at first to our eyes, so used to serial polygamy, because it has annihilated for her the last of the social relationships that make a person human.

She begins to build herself again in the Aigeus scene.[70] There she acquires a home and a city and the possibility of future children. With Christopher Gill (1996: 155 ff.) I believe that the first scene between Medea and Jason seals her plans. The Aigeus-scene gives her a space from which to voice them.

The power she assumes is undifferentiated, like that of human beings before they were split in half (according to Aristophanes' myth in the *Symposium*). She is man and woman, god and beast, even stone and wave. She is Hellene and barbarian, light and dark, good and evil, capable of creating life and equally capable of destroying it.

What is Jason? He is reduced to her state as it was between the second and third episodes, a small man shaking his sword at the universe. He is childless like Aigeus and Creon (just before his death), homeless like Medea, without a country, without friends, without a future. He cannot go back to Iolcus. Medea has even arrogated his exploits. He is completely *amêchanos* ("helpless, without resources"): the Euripidean un-hero or ex-hero "à l'alpha-privatif" (to paraphrase Menu).

And Medea? Through the figure of Medea that he has created for this play, Euripides shows that a woman in the conditions imposed by law and custom can be human only by denying her womanhood and her humanity. She is tragic like Heracles, Achilles, and Ajax; and like Antigone and Orestes. Like them she is a victim of herself, of her "heroic temper." The rigidity of the heroic temper confronts a paradox equally inflexible. For in denying the softness, frailty, mutability of the mortal condition it seeks the implacable finality of death. But Medea in performing her "exemplary gesture"[71] uniquely understands exactly what she is doing. She suffers the consequences of her action precisely as she commits her shocking crimes.

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[70] Gredley (1987: 31), speaks of "an alternative space" opened for Medea by Aigeus. Zerba (2002) writes of Medea's changes as "a series of improvisations" (332) and says perceptively (321), "The rhetorically provisional nature of the posturing is repeatedly disclosed in the play." I find her argument very compelling, but have not yet resolved whether there is, as she believes, no consistent *êthos* in Medea's character. It was her "improvisational" skills that kept her alive and able to move on to the next big or small thing. Is there any human being or character in a play who really has continuity of self? I agree with Zerba that Medea's shifts of ethical grounding are astounding.

[71] Gill (1996: 154, 168).

Medea does not turn order into chaos. She does not find a perfect (or even stable) Hellenic society and overthrow it. She exposes the rottenness at its heart—and then goes on to exploit it. She will live with Aigeus as his partner until Theseus' coming of age. In their one scene they treated each other with friendship and equality. From the chaos of her multiple self she will recreate herself as an Athenian wife.

CHAPTER TWO

MEDEA AND JASON

> "Thank God," they whispered to themselves, "thank God I ain't never had one of them graveyard loves."
> Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

In this chapter we will look at details of two scenes from the marriage of Jason and Medea (the second and fourth episodes), to see how their lives, though soon to be separated, are still entangled not only by their past, but in the very structures of the language Jason uses to prove his superiority and in the means Medea uses to manipulate the expectations Jason has of her as a woman like all the rest of her sex in order to gain his participation in his own destruction and that of his family.

The Second Episode

What are they to each other now, these two people who have been through so much together? What persona does Medea put on in her first scene with Jason? Medea's fierce temper is the only characteristic that springs to Jason's mind when he accosts his wife on his first entrance (446–7). To him she is certainly the ὀξύθυμος ("quick tempered person," 319) that in the previous episode Creon preferred to the σιωπηλὸς σοφός ("silent crafty type," 320),[1] though she can be the latter as well, as she will demonstrate in her second onstage encounter with Jason. What we have seen of and heard from her by the time of Jason's arrival to open the second episode confirms at least the rapidity of her changes in mood or mode of self-presentation.[2] It is almost as if these two partners invent each other and each responds to the invented character rather than the consistently known human being of the past relationship, which is of course, consistent with the nature of drama:

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[1] There is no winning with Creon since like a tyrant in the new sense that gained common currency in the later fifth century he makes his own definitions.

[2] This is called "role-playing" to emphasize aspects of self-consciousness, theatricality, and rhetorical attempts to convince the audiences.

we see only the aspects of character that can be encapsulated in the episodes of the play, and yet we also get a wider perspective from what the characters say about each other and themselves, and especially the knowledge they display of the *êthos* of the other characters.[3] Medea has called Jason the most vile man alive (229); she has acknowledged to Creon her hatred of him (310–1). At times he seems almost (since he did not witness these scenes) to respond to her words about him (451–2, 463–4), and this adds to the feeling that we are seeing the end of a situation that has been in existence for some time. Jason presents his point of view, but without the sympathy that Medea claims, until he is reduced at the end to the kind of heartbreak and loss of status she had suffered at the beginning.

Jason, speaking first, presents himself in relation to Medea (as do all the other men except Aigeus, who alone realizes that he has an existence independent of her and concerns of his own that do not refer to her circumstances).[4] Jason, like the other men in the play, has been created to elucidate aspects of Medea, so that it seems natural to the audience that he is ready-made to be the shameless Jason of her mind. He sets himself up as the exact opposite of his wife. In his assessment (446–64):

He is reasonable.	She is irrationally angry.
He gets along well with the royals.	She protests against the royal family.
He has her best interest at heart.	She hates him.
He is indifferent to her words.	She hurts herself with words.

Jason's indifference, his superior tone, his complacency and self-satisfaction are assembled primarily to be answered by her tirade. To Medea everything he says and has done adds up to utter shamelessness in light of what she has done for him and how he has reciprocated.

"A man who loves no longer":[5] Jason is not such a creature and it is hard to see how anyone could mistake him for a man who once loved his wife but now has fallen in love with another woman. It is Medea

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[3] In *Medea*, except for Aigeus, who intimates a knowledge of Medea from the past, and the chorus, who claim an established affection for the house (137–8), such ethical knowledge of each other concerns flaws in character and behavior. In *Hippolytus* there is a shining example of this ethical knowledge that persists, despite the swift scenic developments, in the words of the messenger, one of Hippolytus' servant companions, who says of his master, "I know that he is good" (1254).

[4] As evidenced by his responding to her questions rather than beginning his stage life with commands to or vituperation of her.

[5] As Page (1938: xiv–xv) calls him.

who once loved him and loves him no longer, not because she loves someone else, but because he has betrayed and shamed her. She followed him, as women often do, for the life she would share with him as his wife and partner. He has taken away that life because he has chosen to share or simply to live it (as husband/master) with someone else. There seems no reason to doubt his sincerity when he claims indifference to Creon's daughter as a woman. He is a man currently (and perhaps always) incapable of love or even common fellow feeling that would produce the human decency, which in some ways corresponds to *aidôs* and requires respecting one's obligations to *philoi*.[6]

He cannot bring himself to accept *philia* (affection, family feeling) as a guiding principle in his life.[7] To him *philia* is only political, expedient, and useful. His "reason"—which he is supposed by some critics[8] to represent in contrast to Medea's "passion"—is not higher thought, but merely crass, self-interested calculation: then, as now, care must be taken to distinguish the rational from the technically (or technologically) advanced. Jason as a character is good with words, shrewd rather than intelligent. It is as if he had taken a course in ex tempore speaking from an itinerant sophist (one of those professionals notorious for making the worse cause appear the better and teaching others to do the same): he is able to take Medea's tirade and turn every point in it to his advantage, but only in empty words that do not hold up to scrutiny. He persuades neither Medea nor the chorus[9] with his argument, because the evidence of his betrayal is stronger proof than his words. That he can persuade himself is a function of his complacency in being a man facing a mere woman. To Medea can be credited the few logical connections expressed in the scene: for example, that

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[6] When Jason reinvents his past he acknowledges Medea's passion for him, but admits to no such feelings on his part. On *aidôs* and the betrayal of *philoi* see Cairns (1993: 273–4).

[7] Schein (1990: 57) says of Jason that his "whole conception of friendship and kinship . . . φιλία is purely instrumental, and he violates his sworn relationship to Medea for the sake of material advantage far more readily than she brings herself to kill the children." See also Buxton (1982: 152), "it remains predominantly true that whoever behaves in accordance with *philia* in Euripidean tragedy is, to that extent, offered for our approbation."

[8] Collinge (1950: 41–7); cf. Stanton (1987: 97); on the other side, Foley (1989: 70); Reckford (1968: 342); Gill (1996: 217); Lloyd (1992: 42).

[9] It is not that the chorus speaks with the poet's voice, but they, like the audience, are represented as learning and responding step by step. They already sympathize with Medea; Jason's sophistry gives them confirmation. See Gould (in Silk, 1996: 231).

it would be understandable for him to take another wife if he were childless (490–1) and that his perjury shows that he does not believe in the gods he once swore by (492–5). She points out—in case we do not notice it or do not believe it is important—the inconsistency in his construction of the past.

In an affecting essay (which I have found inspiring as well as apt), Christopher Gill describes Jason's "misguided conception . . . of what is involved in leading a human life" and his denial of the fundamental interconnectedness of his and Medea's lives.[10] Jason, as Gill says (160), separates "I" and "you" while Medea interlocks them.

By taking another look at their first scene together with these suggestions about the interlocking of lives in mind, I think we will find that, though Jason tries to separate himself from his forsaken wife, he fails. In his shorter, opening speech he presents himself as an observer, unaffected by his wife's emotional outbursts. And his introductory remarks "not now for the first time, but over and over again" (446) show him revising their past to suit the current situation and in fact generalizing her most particular and justified rage into a cliché, in addition to unwittingly quoting her (cf. 292).[11] He must have found her tendency to act on her passions personally useful in the past and in addition we have already heard Nurse's evidence of the couple's former likemindedness (11–5). He seems, therefore, to be referring to the current disruption in their relations rather than to long experience.

In this rant he lines up their actions into, as it were, two separate columns, completely detaching his from hers:

I have seen. (446)	You are going into exile. (three times: 450, 458, 461)
I kept trying to avert. (456)	Do not stop. (451)
I wanted. (456)	Consider. (454)
I have come. (460)	You do not let up. (457)
I could not have negative feelings for you. (464)	You hate me. (463)

Not only her words are futile: he tries through his indifference to render her whole life, even her hatred, vain. Her only effective speech, according to him, has been her vituperation of the royal family and it

[10] See Gill (1996: 168).

[11] On the significance of their using similar modes of discourse see Williamson (1990: 23–6).

has gotten her deeper into trouble (450, 453–4). Three times he says "you are going into exile" and one more time names banishment as her punishment (454, cf. 462). What clearer indictment of Jason's treachery could we, who have just seen the actual sentence of exile passed on her (and repeated three times by Creon), have?

> This is not the first time, but over and over again, I have seen
> how utterly foolish an intransigent temper is.
> You had the chance to stay in this country and keep your home
> by patiently putting up with what your betters decided,
> but now you have had your say and for it you are to be exiled.
> It makes no difference to me: never let up
> saying that Jason is the vilest man alive.
> But for what you have said against the royal family
> think yourself lucky to be punished with exile.
> I was constantly trying to assuage the passions
> of the rulers in their anger and I wanted you to stay.
> But you could not control your folly, never letting up on your abuse
> of the royal family. That is why you are to be exiled from this land.
> Still, in spite of this I have not come to renounce
> my loved ones, but looking out for your good, woman,
> so that you will not go into exile with the children in need
> or lacking anything. Exile brings many problems
> in its wake. Even if you hate me
> I could never think badly of you. (446–64)

Let us now look at a few details of this opening speech (446–64). In just nineteen lines he uses ten first- or second-person personal pronouns/adjectives, unequally balanced, as is natural since he is blaming her, three first and seven second.[12] He also uses five first person verbs (and in quoting Medea speaks of himself in the third person) and six verbs in the second person. Though he tries to deny it, this pattern shows their lives bound together: for example in line 456 σ' ("you") between two first person verbs shows that Medea is caught in Jason's actions, but the line concludes σ' ἐβουλόμην μένειν ("I wanted you to stay."); the order of words shows that if she had stayed she would continue to entangle him and his wishes for his own happiness even against his will, or stifling his will. At 463 he is caught (enclitically) in her emotion: σύ > με < στυγεῖς ("you hate me") and she in his indifference,

[12] McClure (1999: 383) says that Jason avoids the language of abuse, but not entirely (as she acknowledges). In the first speech besides the numerous second persons, see lines 447, 450, 457–8.

which appears dully through his denial of it in the last line (464). The result is that—despite his separation of them into two opposites, I (Mr. Reasonable) and you (Mrs. Emotional)—his syntax holographically intertwines their lives.

Medea interlocks "I" and "you" (Gill, 160). In her fifty-four line speech (465–519) Medea uses twenty-nine first and second person verb forms and twenty-five personal pronouns of the first and second persons. And though she also uses "we" it seems to be, as is common in tragedy, only a plural used for the singular.[13] There is no more *we* for them. The pattern of "I" and "you" alternates and encircles more in her speech than in Jason's answer. Jason in his turn does use "we" two or three (if we take Elmsley's emendation) times, but it can hardly include Medea, since she was to be discarded to secure "our" comfort and prosperity. Of course "we" works well for him because he is speaking of his family. The chart below maps the use of pronouns in the two speeches (2 for second person; 1 for first person):

Medea: 2 1 (465) | 2 1 2 (467) [1, 468] | 2 (472) | 1 1 (473) | 2 2 2 (474) | 1 (475) | 1 2 (476) | 1 2 (482) | 1 (483) 1 (484) | 2 (485) | 1 (486) | 1 (487) | 1 (488) 2 1 2 (489) | 2 (490) | 2 (491) | 1 (492) | 2 (493) | 2 1 (495) | 2 2 1 (499) | 2 (500) | 2 (501) | 1 (502) | 2 1 (503) | 1 1 (505) | 1 1 (507) | 2 1 (508) | 1 (509) | 2 2 (510) | 1 1 (511) | 1 (512) | 1 2 (515)

Jason: 1 (522) 2 (525) | 1 2 (526) 1 1 (527) | 2 (529) 2 (530) 1 (531) | 1 (532) 2 (533) | 1 (534) 2 2 1 1 (535) | 2 2 (537) 2 (539) 2 (540) 2 2 (541) | 1 (542) 1 (544) | 2 1 (545) 1 2 2 (546) | 1 2 (547) 1 (548) 2 (549) 1 2 (550) | 1 (551) 1 (553) | 2 2 2 (555) 1 (558) | 1 (559) 1 (560) 1 1 (562) 2 (563) 1 (564) 1 2 (565) | 1 (566) 1 (567) | 2 2 2 (568) | 2 (569) 2 (570) 2 (573)

To Medea, Jason's lack of feeling, his inability to comprehend the enormity of what he has done, is incredible. But the only effect her rage has on him is to elicit from him a speech of exactly equal length (since one line of her speech is athetized) that answers her point by point.[14]

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[13] For example, we find the chorus speaking of itself as "I" or "we" and characters do the same. It is therefore hard to draw any significance from the use of a first person plural verb.

[14] On the contrast between the two speeches, see Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 522–75). See also Griffiths (2006: 64), "The relationship between Jason and Medea can…be constructed as an opposition between different modes of speech and communication."

A comparison of their actions (in their own first person verbs) is revealing:

Medea
I have this to say. (465)
I will lighten my heart. (473)
I will begin. (475)
I saved you. (476)
After killing I held up . . . (482)
I arrived [with you: almost a "we"]. (484)
I killed. (486)
I destroyed. (487)
I cannot understand. (492)
I was clung about. (497)
I have lost. (498)
I will share . . . (499)
Where am I to turn? (502)
I came here. (503)
I killed. (505)
I am. (507)
I have. (*bis*: 508, 511)
I will go into exile. (512)
I who saved you. (515)

Jason
I think. (527)
I will not set. (532)
I will indicate. (535)
I will show. (548)
I moved here. (551)
I found. (553)
I do not blame. (558)
We would live. (559)
We would not lack. (560)
I would bring up. (562)
I would put. (564)
I (we) would be happy. (565)
Have I planned? (567)

One can see from this scheme that his only significant action is "I found." Hers are the heroic and violent deeds of the traditional story. These are what Gill calls her "exceptional favours to Jason" (158). (Only the pronouns that represent actual words in the Greek are underlined in the translation.)

Oh, you, utterly vile . . . this is the worst charge I have
to say against your total lack of manliness.
You have come to me, you who are most hateful
[to the gods and to me and to the whole human race[15]]?
This is not daring; this is not courage,
to abuse your loved ones and look them in the face,
but the greatest of all human diseases,
shamelessness. Still you have done me a favor in coming.
I will lighten my grief by reviling you
and you will feel the sting in hearing it.
I will begin to speak from the beginning.
I saved your skin, as all the Greeks know
who boarded the Argo with you,
sent to master the fire-breathing bulls
with yokes and to sow the deadly field;
and the dragon which guarded the golden fleece
and, sleepless, protected it with its many coils,
I killed it and held up for you the light of safety.
As for me, after betraying my father and my home
I came to Iolcus near Pelion
with you, eager more than smart.
Then I killed Pelias, so that he would die most tragically
at the hands of his own children and I confounded their whole house.
And you, after receiving this from me, you, the vilest man alive,
you have betrayed me, and you have taken a new marriage,
though you already have children. If you were still childless
it would be excusable for you to have a craving for another marriage bed.
Gone is the faith of oaths. I cannot understand
whether you believe the old gods no longer are in power
or that new covenants are established for men today,
since you must know that you have not kept your oath to me.
Ah, right hand, how fervently you were taken
and these knees, how futilely we were clung to in supplication
by an evil man. But I have lost my hopes.
Come. I will share with you as if you were a friend.
What will I get out of it?
Still . . . under questioning you will appear more shameless.
Now where will I turn? To my father's house
which I betrayed for you along with my native land, when I came here?

[15] This line (468) is often bracketed because it is repeated at line 1324 by Jason. Again I am of mixed minds because Jason quotes Medea on at least one other occasion (446) and the line seems appropriate here as well as in the later passage.

> Or to the unhappy daughters of Pelias? They would be delighted
> to take me in. I murdered their father.
> This is how it is. I have made myself an enemy
> to my loved ones at home, whom I should not have
> hurt, in helping you I have enemies.
> And for this you have made me an object of admiration
> among the women of Greece: I have in you a wonderful
> husband and faithful to me—oh, the pity of it
> if I must go into exile, cast out of this country
> without friends, a lonely mother with two lonely children,
> a fine reproach to the new bridegroom
> that your children are homeless beggars, with me, the woman
> who saved your life.
> Oh Zeus! Why have you given us a clear test
> of gold to tell which is counterfeit
> but of men—where to identify an evil one is a must—
> there is no such mark on his body? (465–519)

In fact Medea's speech both entangles and separates the "I" and "you." She, however, always includes Jason, while he tries but fails to exclude her. For example at the beginning of her speech (473–4) "I will lighten my heart by speaking ill of you and you will feel pain hearing." Here they are separated into two: I will speak, you will hear; I will feel pleasure, you pain. "I saved you" (476). This is one of Gill's examples of Medea's emphasis on the interconnectedness of their lives (160 and n. 233). Hers is the action of which he is the beneficiary. He is embraced (482) in her salvific action. "I came to Iolcus with you," she puts them together: it is close to being a "we." Compare this to Jason's "when I moved here from Iolcus, dragging along many difficulties" (551–2). At 490, she continues the reference to their private life, but the you is separate: "if you were childless." Her children are his children and unfortunately they cannot be separated from their parents' lives, but he was the one with the mobility to look for another marriage. These doomed children go back and forth in this scene, now hers, now his. The intellectual distance between wife and husband is emphasized (492–3), "I can't understand whether you believe…" In the center of the tirade she talks about their physical contact which has ended in vain, but which should have been a sign of their reciprocal relationship: he begged for her help and received it; in return he made a pact with her. From touching, she moves to sharing. Jason becomes more entrapped, οὓς σοι προδοῦσα (503, "whom I betrayed for you"), in Medea's betrayal of her family; and so does she: they both become trapped in the syntax of the lines: σε ἔχω πόσιν; also seen and heard

as ἔχω πόσιν...ἐγώ (511, "I have you as a husband"). At the end of her harangue (514–5) they are to be separated: she is to leave, but he is surrounded by his shameful deed, for which in her mind the reproach is just: καλὸν ὄνειδος > τῷ νεωστὶ νυμφίῳ < πτωχοὺς ἀλᾶσθαι ("a fine reproach > to the newly-wed husband < that [the children and I who saved you] go wandering as homeless beggars"). He is still in the picture, even if it is only her picture. His new marriage is framed and indeed overwhelmed by their past and Medea's future. Her verbal strategy is to use words of blame[16] and to recount her past favors, which now that their fruits have been enjoyed and they are not repeatable, are truly recalled in vain. There is little subtlety in her gross strategy. The subtlety appears in her syntactical entrapment. She needs to retell their story because of Creon's sentence of banishment. Where can she go as an exile? Clearly she cannot go anywhere she has ever been before. The Clashing Rocks were opened forever, after the Argo sailed through them, but not for Medea. Her past and all the places in it are closed. Jason reopens that past to emend it. The past they shared is now separated into two stories. Each diminishes the other's part in their common legend.

I must, it seems, not be a weak orator
but like the skillful captain of a ship
reefing my sails, outrun
the blasts of your tongue-lashing, woman.
And, since you make such a mountain of it
I think that Kypris, god of love, was the savior
of my expedition, and she alone of gods or men.
You have a subtle mind, but it would be tedious
to go through every detail of the story, how with his inescapable
arrows
Love compelled you to save me.
Still, I will not put too fine a point on it.
However much you have benefitted me, all well and good.[17]
And you certainly got more out of saving me
than you put in, as I will demonstrate.
First you make your home in Greece instead of
an alien land and you experience justice
and the rule of laws, not merely force.
All the Greeks are aware that you are a wise woman
and you have fame. If you still lived

[16] See McClure (1999: 379–88).
[17] This is a way of saying "and I thank you for it."

at the ends of the earth, no one would know your story.
Let me have no gold in my home;
give me no song to sing sweeter than Orpheus'
if my fate should be insignificant.
This much I had to say about my labors.
For you are the one who turned our discussion into a contest.
Now the reproaches you heap on my royal marriage,
here I will prove first that I am wise
and then sensible and finally a great benefactor to you
and my children. Let me finish.[18]
When I arrived here from the land of Iolcus
dragging with me many useless encumbrances,
what luckier opportunity could I have found
than, though a refugee, to marry the king's daughter?
It is not the thing that is eating you, because I hated my
  marriage to you
and was infatuated by desire of my new bride,
nor because I had a craving for more and more children
—the ones I have are enough and I am satisfied with them—
but so that—and this is important—we might live well
and not be in need. I am well aware that
even a friend shuns a poor man and stays out of his way,
and so that I might bring up my children worthily of my house,
and father brothers to your children
and put them on an equal footing and join the families
so that we could live well. What do you need with children?[19]
It's in my interest to help my living children
with future offspring. Have I made bad plans?
You would not say so if the marriage bed did not gnaw at you.

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[18] Medea interrupts, perhaps because of the outrageous suggestion that the betrayer is the benefactor or she may balk at his appropriation of the children as his.

[19] Children belonged to the man. In case of a divorce it was usual (almost universal) for the children to go with the father. The exile of Jason's children, then, is strange and suggests that it is not only Medea whom Creon wants out of the way, but the children as well, because they are a reminder to him and his daughter that Jason is a married man. Jason does not need any more children by Medea. After he failed to regain his kingdom at the demise of Pelias, his only hope for royal status is through sons by the princess. Since Greek marriage was for the purpose of the birth of legitimate sons, by saying to Medea "What need have you for children?" Jason is denying her any value at all. The question, posed by some scholars, of the legitimacy of Medea's children is, in my opinion, a red herring. First, neither Jason nor Medea is a citizen. Next, the laws of fifth-century Athens (according to which only children with citizen parents on both sides could be enrolled as citizens) cannot be imposed upon heroic-age Corinth. Furthermore, many heroes are of mixed and illegitimate parentage, including Theseus (Athens' national hero), who will be the product of Aigeus' liaison with Pittheus' daughter, on his way home to Athens, after he leaves Medea. And finally, Jason admits, "The [children] I have are enough and I am satisfied with them" (558).

> But you have reached such a point, you women,
> that if your marriage is in good order you think you
> have it all, but if anything goes wrong in your marriage
> the best and finest things you count
> as their opposite. There should be some other way
> for men to produce children. Women would not have to exist at all.
> And then there would be no more troubles for mankind. (522–75)

Though Jason does to some extent intertwine the "I" and "you" (e.g. 526–8), when he acknowledges Medea's help, it is in the most impersonal way imaginable, not including himself at all in the matter-of-fact statement: "where you helped, it's not bad" (almost a "thank you," 533), making even this faint expression of gratitude a favor *from* him. He has just promised not to go into any more invidious details about the erotic compulsion she was under when she saved him. And he continues this insistence that she should be grateful to him for saving his life with a series of *you, you, you, you, you, you* (536–41) at the end of which he hints at something they share: a fondness for notoriety. Hers, however, has been for that elusive thing, *eukleia* ("recognition as a hero") more than simple fame.

Jason introduces his rebuttal by referring to her harangue condescendingly. She had called him "the vilest man alive." He calls her simply γύναι (525, "woman, wife, madam") and, using a simile drawn from his sailing career, a strictly masculine part of their adventure, distances himself from the current action. By not participating in the name-calling but instead using a sesquipedalian abstract noun to describe the sound of her voice (525) he shows his disengagement from their fight, while calling it ἅμιλλα (546, "trial" or "contest") and treating it as a rhetorical competition that he must win to save face, rather than as a deadly serious emotional struggle and engagement with an equal.

Though at times he alternates his first and second persons (as in 526–7: *I, you, I, my*), he proceeds to remove her as a player at all, substituting Kypris, both as goddess and as the power of erotic love (529–31). Again, instead of making Medea the subject of the act of saving him, he makes her the object of an infatuation which compelled her to save him. He uses, furthermore, the periphrasis τοὐμὸν…δέμας ("my body," "my person," "me," 531) for the simple ἐμέ ("me"), as if he could thus make her saving his life less personal, less about himself but about one more of his possessions. These words surround the action of saving, but also may be said to be split in two by it (τοὐμὸν ἐκσῶσαι δέμας, 531). Jason does not realize that the man she saved

is, according to the rules of common decency, incompatible with the traitor he now is. Again (at 534) with the use of an abstract noun and possessive he removes her agency from his deliverance, as if it were a thing of his own, not performed by anyone. From there, he goes on, "*you* got more than *you* gave, as *I* will demonstrate." Her generous heroic action is subordinated to him, to become merely one of his rhetorical flourishes (see Gill, 162). He continues in this outrageous vein, each addition worse than the last, in his unrelenting six *you*s in a row:

> *You* live in Greece. (537)
> *You* know justice and the use of law. (537)
> All the Greeks know *you* are σοφή. (539)
> *You* have acquired a reputation. (540)
> If *you* were living at the ends of the earth…(540–1)
> there would be no λόγος of *you*. (541)

forgetting that they came to Greece together, participating in the same adventure, overlooking that she came as his wife and has no other reason to be there (Gill, 162) and that she is being exiled from the home they once shared and has no other place to go. Though not exiled from Hellas, as a divorced woman without male kin, she no longer has a home there. He speaks as if they were leading two different lives. *You* live in Greece, he says, not *we*. *You* have a story, as if he had never heard of *Le mythe de Jason et Médée*. Now they *are* living separate lives and separate stories. Justice and law, which he claims she shares (537), do not in fact apply to her because she is a woman without family, without a κύριος ("guardian") to protect her rights and her person: she has just (in the previous episode) been threatened with violence and even death and driven out of the *polis*, unprotected by its civilizing power, to go wandering the roads, not safe for a woman alone with fatherless children, not safe even for most men.[20] Contrary to Jason's obsession with fame, her reputation for *sophia* has damaged her chances of keeping her home. She regrets coming to the center of the universe with this Greek man, leaving her foreign home, that most of all. (And the chorus confirms in the next ode that it is the worst thing of all to be deprived of one's native land, 642 ff., reminding us of this theme if we had been caught up in heat of vituperation of the scene and lost

[20] See Dyson (1987: 25), "The miseries of orphans and exiles is a general theme in Greek literature. And it is the degradation of such a life for her sons that in her eyes makes their survival no viable alternative."

sight of its centrality). Being famous in Greece has a different meaning for Medea than it does for Jason. It will, however, help her in the next scene. At this point it has brought her nothing but misfortune and, perhaps, the futile sympathy of the women. And how is Jason himself making his fortune ἐπίσημος ("notorious")? By marrying into the royal family, where he is and will remain subordinate to the tyrant and his daughter: that is, he tries but does not succeed in assuaging the kings' anger at Medea (455–6, the plural βασιλέων, perhaps including the king and his daughter) and later will need to wheedle and bribe his new wife to persuade her father to let him keep his own children.[21] Because their lives have now gone their separate ways Jason is unaware that the things he is cataloguing to her, far from being benefits, are the very things that now are ruining her life.

Next (545) he tries to appropriate her favors to him (renaming them *his* favors to *her*) as *his* labors.

We must bear in mind what his second marriage has actually done to Medea and the children when we listen to his justification of it. Some critics[22] have suggested that there is no reason to disbelieve Jason's explanation. I cannot agree. He has just indicated in speech that he has no knowledge or understanding of Medea's life or current status; in the first episode we have just seen and heard every item in his list of benefits turned into the opposite. Now he claims that he married the princess for the benefit of Medea and the children, hardly credible after his previous lack of interest in them. His actions and their result give the lie to his words. He cannot, furthermore, keep his pronouns and personal endings straight, especially concerning exactly who is responsible for what. And yet to further underscore the distortion in his thinking, whereas he has dispossessed Medea from their shared adventures, he interlocks the "I" and "you" in his words about this new marriage that in actual fact is his attempt to divorce Medea, past and

[21] He is like the modern comic character-type of the feckless son-in-law of the boss, accepted only because the doting parent likes to indulge his daughter.

[22] Collinge (1950: 142); Palmer (1951: 49–55); Shaw (1975: 258–9); Ohlander (1989: 85–6), though admitting that the audience would find Jason offensive does point out cogently in discussing the merits of Jason's third argument (89) that he mentions the children's welfare five times. But the children really are not important to Jason until they are dead. See Galis (1992: 68), "At best Jason's attachment to the children is something less than constant, waxing and waning with his estimate of his prospects for insuring the continuation of his house through better placed progeny than his sons by Medea." He does not mention them in his first speech and only brings them up in the second because she had used them in her accusation.

future, from his life: *to me—you—I—to you—my* (547–50). Like it or not, he is deeply entangled in his relationship with Medea, in his marriage to her (cf. σὸν…ἐχθαίρων λέχος, 555). He did his all to get out of that relationship. Saying something, even on stage, does not make it true. We know enough about the present circumstances and how they came about and about life in general to know that Jason's flattering-unction speech is a desperate attempt after the fact to justify his actions. More bluntly put, he is lying.

"I moved from Iolcus, dragging with me many impossible difficulties" (551–4). Here is a clear place where he has separated their lives. This had been the beginning (for Medea and her Nurse) of their perfect, happily-ever-after, married life in Corinth. And he speaks only of himself and his difficulties. This is monstrous, possibly the worst example of his attempted disengagement from her. There was the time they had a chance to achieve a human existence. To him his family (and the woman who saved him) is "many intractable encumbrances" (552). This is not the way a man speaks of his wife and children in ordinary life.

> πολλὰς—ἐφέλκων—συμφορὰς ἀμηχάνους. (552)

His word picture is of a refugee with a helpless (or useless) child on each side. They are dragging him back. And not just the children, Medea is trailing along behind (cf. ἀμήχανον κακόν, "an unmanageable evil," at the beginning of his first speech, 447). He frees himself from them simply by denying their connection and usefulness to him. "I came here from Iolcus." Medea is just part of the baggage ("carried off as booty," 256, she had said with some truth as we now see, objective as well as dramatic). "I found" a new marriage, though (I was) a refugee. Medea, also a refugee then, has not ceased to be one.

He married the princess:

> So that…we might live well
> and we might not lack anything, [I] knowing that
> everyone keeps clear of a poor friend
> and that I might rear children worthily of my house,
> and fathering brothers to the children from you
> I might set them on the same footing and joining the family
>   together
> I might be happy/prosperous. (559–65)

He uses "we" (559) but in agreement with it the masculine singular participle and shifts to "I" in the last line (see Gill, 163 n. 265). How to interpret this "we"? Is it simply a plural for singular, which is very

common in tragedy? Does he include the "living children" in it? Or is it just himself and his new family? He cannot be including Medea in the first person plural but he does mention her (in the second singular, σέθεν, 563) because he has to distinguish the two sets of children. Does he mean, as he goes on, that once there are brothers he will take these children back? Is this the meaning of his appropriating them with the words "my children"? And is this why he says "what do *you* need with children?" Which children does he mean when he says παίδας (at 562)? It could refer to all the real and imagined children in his mind. It is clear that he believes he cannot rear any children worthily of his house unless he fathers royal Corinthian children. All these (four or more) sons would be his children and therefore the ones he is doing this for. All the action is his. The women are just necessary (and evil) instruments for the procreation of a *man*'s children.

> What do <u>you</u> need with children? (σοί τε, 565)
> It helps <u>me</u> to benefit the living ones with future children. (ἐμοί τε, 566)

Again he has separated his own and Medea's lives into parallel stories. And the children, no longer part of a family, will be his when he wants them, but are hers when they are in his way. Right now they are in his way. When Jason calls the children *his*, projects uniting them with future royal children, and asks what need she has of children, he has turned her into the equivalent of his slave. She would raise the children for him; she would be keeper or minder of Jason's children (cf. line 53) in which she would have no stake.

He ends in the mode of blame: *you, you, you*, three times in the singular and, generalizing to include Medea with all women (as she, admittedly, also had done), three times in the plural. To him Medea is a typical woman. Why was she not to Creon?[23] Creon must realize that he has wronged her. Jason seems to have satisfied himself with his own splendid sophistry that he has done no such thing. He has convinced himself that any wrong she suffers or feels is because of her own words and actions in cursing the monarchs or, because, due to her own nature as a woman, she is interested in one thing only, the marriage couch. This (568–75) is typical of the traditional blame poetry of men against women.[24]

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[23] See Jouan's interesting piece (1996: 93) on the different reactions to Medea. To him Jason is such a (male and Greek) chauvinist that he cannot appreciate either Medea's past deeds or her present threats.

[24] See McClure (1999: 383).

Both speeches end with general wishes, but Jason's, like his whole oration, denying the need to participate in a reciprocal relationship, is a wish that women did not exist (573–5). Medea, on the other hand ends with an implied wish that is specific to the situation and in keeping with her first speech to the chorus. She does not say that all men are bad and should not exist, but only longs for a way of telling the good from the bad (516–9). This is advantageous to her because coming along in the next episode is a man she will have to trust. She does, however, in wishing for a mark or stamp (χαρακτήρ, 519) to distinguish good men from bad, dehumanize him (and all men); the mark (or brand) is used for something that is *owned* (coins, herd animals, slaves).[25] Jason by typing her with all other women sets himself up for her deception of him in the guise of the stereotypical woman.[26] The value and the danger of stereotypes are the same: they tell us what to expect from persons of a given designation. This may help us organize the world into lists of differences and oppositions, something of which the ancient Greeks were very fond, but it fails to recognize that the individual is not the type. Euripides makes his Medea able to see through the profiling of people before getting to know them inside and out (219–21) and thus take advantage of the tendency in others.

In the rest of the scene, the chorus and Medea acknowledge that Jason has given a plausible (or specious) speech (εὐσχήμων, 584, εὖ ἐκόσμησας, 576) but agree that his words and deeds are unjust: οὐ δίκαια (578), ἄδικος (580).[27] The women together reach their height of like-mindedness here. Medea's argument that she should have been consulted in this new scheme for their mutual benefit, given the fact that in the past she did everything for him and agreed with him in everything, is irrefutable. He could not include her because what he is saying is false. As Gill says with delicate understatement, "The claim that one has remarried (in secret) *for the sake of* one's previous wife and children (559–67) seems abnormal by virtually any standard."[28]

The second episode, then, gives a quick but needed reprise of this famous couple's lives and legend: past, present, and future. The past summarized already by Nurse as a shared story of the beginnings of a

[25] See duBois (1982: 112–5). Theseus' comparable wish in *Hippolytus* is for two voices (928–31). This—since speech is the most characteristically human act—at least does not try to deny human status to those who would have this "mark."

[26] On Medea's use of stereotypes see Barlow's admirable piece (1989: *passim*).

[27] A quite good reason to disbelieve what Jason has said.

[28] Gill (1996: 163 n. 245).

family is dismembered into her past favors and his voyage, helped by the favors of the gods and the imposition of Eros. The present, the abusive scene itself, her isolation and his comfort and acceptance into the royal family leads to their separate futures, hers as a homeless vagabond and his in a new family, happy in his wealth and position.

In this scene Jason, Medea, and the chorus all use the word *philoi* ("loved ones, friends, family") of the relationship between the two spouses.[29]

Jason:	Still I have come not disowning (renouncing, divorcing) φίλοι. (459)
Medea:	Mistreating φίλοι... (470)
Chorus:	φίλοι to φίλοι (521)
Medea:	σιγῇ φίλων ("in secret from your friends/family," 587)
Jason:	You thrust away φίλοι. (622)

Jason, while not believing in the power of words, as effective instruments of abuse or as binding one to a promise, oath, or prayer, seems to trust that words put together well, no matter how false, will win the day, and will make his unjust deeds right.[30] That is, he constructs another reality made of words, a baser alternative to the story we are seeing. Despite his concern for his reputation, as if he can divorce what Medea says of him from what he is to himself or others, he does not care what she *says* about him, all the more forcing her to substitute deeds for words: when her words fail what other choice does she have? He has said that he could never *think* ill of her (464, κακῶς φρονεῖν) which she answers by saying that he should be ashamed of the wrong he has *done* her (470, κακῶς δράσαντ'). The chorus, like children wanting their parents to make up, tries with futile words to join them together again as friends. Medea knocks Jason's argument flat with her σιγῇ φίλων ("in secret from your loved ones"): one does not keep good news secret from one's *philoi*. Jason as the betrayer of his *philoi* has failed as a hero

[29] On the *Medea* as a challenge to the audience to "rethink the traditional institution of *philia*" see Schein (1990: 57). Also Belfiore (2000: 122), "The essence of "the tragic," for the ancient Greeks, is the representation of acts in which *philoi* harm or are about to harm *philoi*." And (122) "*Philia* is not simply one "theme" or subject of tragedy, it constitutes the biological, social, religious, and emotional reality within which the action takes place."

[30] On rhetoric as a sign of Jason's insincerity, see Lloyd (1992: 42–3) and chapter 1 n. 48 above.

and even as an ethical Greek man. "You drive your friends away," he says (622). He cannot any longer by calling himself a *philos* be one.[31] He does not understand this now and even at the end of his tragedy he does not have any eye-opening scene of enlightenment either. The language of blame at the end shows him as blind to his own failings as ever. What he does finally realize is his human vulnerability and for this we are justified in pitying him.

And each in their first scene together uses the word *philos* in a revealing way:

Medea: "As if speaking to a *philos*" (499). The ὡς shows her utter contempt for him. He is not a φίλος. And yet he calls the very thing that has made him ἔχθιστος ("most hated, the worst enemy") *a great friend* to her and his children.

Jason: The marriage is μέγας φίλος ("a great friend," 549).

The Fourth Episode

At the end of the fourth episode, the second Jason and Medea scene, as the little procession of children with their father and minder is leaving, marking an end to this family, the chorus will sing in pity for everyone, even Jason, everyone, that is, except Creon.[32] "How you have gone astray from your μοῖρα" ("portion, part, lot"). Jason had planned out a life, a portion, for himself. He has finally succeeded in getting what he had wanted from the beginning. Adding the children only improves it. They are his *philoi* and he will be able to enjoy them and eventually benefit from them. In fact, in his mind, it is even better than before because he is able to help his first family and now nobody could possibly be angry with him or want to hurt him. The fourth episode is Jason's finest hour. One can, by projecting the outcome, with the chorus, feel pity for him.

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[31] Mueller (2001: 483–4) says that Jason attempts "to remove himself from the nexus of reciprocal social obligations entailed by *philia*." Medea regains her autonomy through her mastery of gift exchange (Mueller, 2001: 474 *et passim*).

[32] The only pity Creon gets is from himself (and the playwright and messenger, in his pathetic words about the ageing of Creon and piteous references to his melted flesh).

After the Aigeus scene, Medea calls Jason back. She is in control of even the tiniest scenic detail. Jason is glad to come back to play once more the exasperated, rational man—even acknowledging that he has come at her direction—because the last scene, from his point of view, had been left unfinished. He had not gotten his way. Almost to his last words in the second episode he had continued calling them friends (622). He sincerely wants his parting from Medea and his children to be more amicable and he wants to have more control over that separation by giving her money and tokens of identification of a guest friendship (610–3) to ease her transition into homelessness. He has cast himself as the generous man ("with unstinting hand," 612) and giver of favors. She, of course, in this episode thwarts his desires by giving to him instead of taking. But Medea, understanding so well Jason's needs as a man and a Hellene, makes it his favor to her that she is allowed to give him her children and bestow upon his bride a priceless gift.

> I have come at your bidding. For even though you hate me
> I could not fail you, but I will hear
> what it is you want from me now, woman. (866–8)

Jason's words are abrupt, his opening shorter than in the earlier scene. The relative numbers of lines each has in the fourth episode indicates the shift in control as Medea takes charge of his every move, squelching even his one objection that it is not in her interest to give away her valuables (959–63 and the abrupt 964). In the earlier scene her vituperation had evoked from him a version of his story that allowed him to save face: he has not deserted her, but is just trying to provide for the family. Now that alternative version seems to him to be the going story and to be accepted even by her. He is easily averted since he is in such a generous, expansive, almost affectionate mood. "What do you want of me this time?" (868). He is (in his flattering self-assessment) always willing to accommodate, as he has been in the past, bringing her to Greece, planning a brighter future for his family.

The scene is wonderfully complex, full of truth-like lies. Medea is believable because this is what she used to be like, as we know, not from someone glimpsing their marriage from the outside, but from Medea's most intimate household slave: "agreeing with Jason in all things" (13). In the last ode the chorus had sung of Athens and Medea's presence there, not holy with the citizens (Kovacs' reading of 850): will she be a pollution or a creature of power like Oedipus, averting evil? Probably the former if we remember her future attempt on Theseus' life. Now

she is the woman of men's (deceptive) dreams again, playing upon every female stereotype.[33]

> Jason, I ask you to forgive me for the things
> I said before. And it is reasonable that you put up with
> my temper, since many acts of love have passed between us.
> I have gone through the arguments with myself
> and I reproached myself, "Stubborn woman, why do I rave
> and show hatred to those who wish me well,
> and make myself an enemy to the rulers of this country
> and to my husband who is doing the most advantageous things for us
> in marrying royalty and fathering brothers
> for my children? Shall I not give up
> my anger—what is wrong with me? The gods provide well.
> Don't I have children, don't I know that
> I am a refugee in need of friends?
> In contemplating these things I realized I was suffering
> under a delusion and that my rage was in vain.
> I accept it now. You seem to me to be acting logically
> in bringing us this marriage alliance, and I was foolish.
> I should have taken part in the arrangements
> and joined you in the ceremony and stood by the bed
> and taken delight in your bride as a member of the family.
> But we are what we are, we women:
> I will not say evil. But you should not copy our faults;
> don't repay silliness in kind.
> I give up and admit that I was wrong
> then, but now I have come to a better way of thinking.
> Children, children, come out of the house.
> Greet your father and speak to him
> with me and give up our earlier hostility
> to become friends again, along with your mother.
> We have made a truce and our anger is over.
> Take his right hand. Ah me, for our troubles:
> secret sorrows flood into my mind.
> My children, will you live for a long time
> to stretch out your dear arms in this way?
> Ah! I am near tears and full of fear.
> At long last I have put off the strife with your father,
> and tears fill my tender sight. (869–905)

[33] As Barlow (1989: 163) points out, Medea plays upon "precisely these assumptions which will govern Jason's reaction," about women, that they are malleable, foolish, emotional, fearful, self-deprecating, prone to ask for favors or forgiveness.

In the earlier scene Jason had remembered only his wife's temper and seen it as useless. Now (869–71) she asks for forgiveness and reminds him of past intimacies, using the intimate first person dual and ending with the upbeat φίλα, as Page paraphrases *ad loc*. "many acts of kindness have been done in the past as the basis of mutual tolerance now." She achieves her ends because he is the man and knows he is the more reasonable member of their partnership, a fact of which she also subtly reminds him. Then she invents a scene that never took place, a dialogue with herself. In fact she stages and blocks the whole episode from summoning Jason to managing the minor characters and props to setting up the scene of the messenger's speech. Here she disposes of all the characters, human and divine, while seeming to cede all power to Jason and the royal family.

Visually this scene would at its outset resemble the second episode, but that had been carefully orchestrated as a standoff with equal speeches by each and ended with Jason stalking off in a mixture of sulk ("you push me aside," 622) and huff ("I'm not going to discuss this any more," 609) and Medea hissing at his departing back (625–6).

In her fictitious internal dialogue (872–81), she uses the first and third persons and includes all the characters in the story. In the story known to Jason, that is. She does not include Aigeus. Aigeus is her secret. She goes through the details of her self-scrutiny, proving to Jason that this is what she has been doing while he was away at the palace and displaying her inventiveness to those of us in the know. Aigeus, whether or not he gives Medea ideas (to get at Jason by killing his children), certainly gives her a certain amount of power. She is an exile, yes, three times an exile—from home, from Thessaly, and soon from the Isthmus of Corinth—but now she has a place to go, a very special place. Creon and Jason would naturally think that Medea is in their power because they know nothing of Aigeus' visit. For obviously the Athenian was not planning a state visit to Creon,[34] whom he calls a ξένος (a person with whom he has had a guest-host relationship, 730, rather than the φίλτατος δορυξένων, "closest of military allies," which Pittheus merits, 687), but mentions him in no other way and does not respond positively to any of Medea's references to him. Compare Creon with Pittheus, king of Trozen, son of Pelops, "a most reverent man, wise and skilled,"

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[34] See Browne (1952: 76), "Euripides goes out of his way to emphasize that Aegeus is hurrying through Corinth."

and to Aigeus' mind, "the best of his allies in war" (683–7). The full listing of epithets for Pittheus tells us what Creon is not. Creon is the ruler of Corinth (and father of Jason's new wife) but is entitled to no honorifics, patronymics (except the pejorative descendant of Sisyphus) or positive epithets, just many words for "king."

Not unreasonably Medea scripts her self-addressed reproach, inventing the scene like a playwright, not including a second person address to Jason, but it is written for his ears; it is based on his ideas. "I'm out of my mind and angry with those planning well" (βουλεύουσιν εὖ, 874: cf. Jason's μῶν βεβούλευμαι κακῶς; "have I planned badly?," 567). "And I make myself an enemy to the kings of the land and my husband" (Jason is not yet in the group of rulers) "who is doing for me (us) the most advantageous things": what could be cozier or more suited to the caring husband than ὃς ἡμῖν δρᾷ (876, "who is doing [the most advantageous things] for us"), with the family ("us") wrapped in his benevolence? The second marriage is most advantageous (876; cf. his μέγας φίλος and λύει and 460, 620). "Marrying the royal person and fathering brothers for my children" (877–8). In quoting her invented inner debate (a rehearsal for the real one which she will have with herself in the presence of her children, perhaps), she is able to put Jason one step away as "he" (876) rather than "you," and to talk about "my children" (878). She also avoids gendering the royal person (877). "Shall I not give up my anger?" (878–9): exactly as Jason advised (615; cf. 447, 457, 600–2). And she adds the possibly ironic, since the gods really are helping Medea out, "and why not, since the gods are making things go well" (879). Aigeus was a lucky break, but not brought to her purely by chance. The chorus believes that Zeus will set things right.[35]

In her apology she turns to Jason, speaking in the second person, having removed the intermediary of her self-address (884). She realizes that she was angry for no reason, or alternatively that she was using her passion in vain in the *agôn* of the second episode (883). "Now I approve" (884). Though she has given up every trace of the blame of her earlier speech she continues to set them up as opposites: you σώφρων (884, "prudent, thoughtful, wise"), I ἄφρων (885, "foolish, mindless, idiotic"). "I should have shared in the planning" (886). She now accepts the bride as another member of the family (which would seem bizarre to anyone who had not heard Jason's speech) whom Jason

[35] See Kovacs (1993: *passim*, esp. 45, 58–9); Collinge (1950: 47); Browne (1952: 77).

brought *to us*. His bride has become *our* bride.[36] In the past they had shared everything. She even tells why he should accept this apology and not be like her, because she is just a woman, teaching him his part as she has always done (889–91; cf. 870–1). He had, after all, ended his major speech by stereotyping women. This episode has been a masterful performance on Medea's part. Each phrase is designed to catch him where he is most vulnerable and wrong-headed because he is so sure of his cultural biases.

To soften him further she calls out her children.[37] She is staging a perfect family scene from real life, a reconciliation after an unusually bitter quarrel. Again, conflating war and marriage, she calls this a truce (898).

The children participate in a partial supplication, reaching out their arms, touching their father's right hand (899, 902). Seeing these gestures, a reminder of how it all started, a foreshadowing of how it is to end, Medea weeps (903–5). These are real tears and the chorus weeps with her, knowing what is to come. But they also work in her manipulation of Jason; for they get him to notice her (as they had done with Aigeus, 922–3: it takes Jason long enough, but he is preoccupied with the children;[38] Aigeus notices the signs of Medea's distress at 689; he, too, is preoccupied with his own worries, but, at least their scene had so far been reciprocal and it continues to be after he brings her more fully into it).

The fourth episode is a perfect example of the cooperation of Jason and Medea as it had existed in the past (when she helped secure the fleece; when she tried to win back the kingdom of Iolcus), only this time Jason is the victim, cooperating in the manipulation of himself. Once again they seem to be joined together inside a new adventure (πόνος): συλλήψομαι δὲ τοῦδέ <u>σοι κἀγὼ</u> <u>πόνου</u> (946, "*I too* will join with you in this project"). What makes Jason believe it? To him it is the only reasonable, even the only possible, way: submission to the will of the stronger (912–3). Medea, like Antigone in her tragedy, does not submit. But she makes it seem as if she has been making plans for the accommodation of her children and their comfort and well-being (to be raised at Jason's hand!). This is what Creon gave her one day to do.

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36 See Verrall's comment *ad loc.* (1881).
37 See Fisher (1993: 105).
38 This, as it turns out, is Jason's farewell to his children.

At the end of the fourth episode we might remember the words of Medea's Nurse and think again of what it meant to Medea to agree with Jason in all things (13). This time it is staged. But once it must have been true. One wonders how she could have submitted to this man, "worthy of no mention" (cf. 962) even to his bride, who beams at him until she sees his children by his former wife (1145–9).

By the fourth episode the play is no longer about the past, but about Medea's future, which she has arranged in the third episode and about which the chorus sings in the third stasimon. And yet we are taken back once more into the past, to gaze upon a second scene from the marriage of Medea and Jason, which represents in its perverted way, an earlier stage than did their first scene together. In episode two we saw the words νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα ("now everything is hateful," 16, of the Nurse's monologue) being dramatized. Now we see the harmonious marriage and heroic generosity of Medea, giving away her treasure, giving away her sons. Are we shocked because it is a sham or do we admire her for making such brilliant use of what she has available to her? Probably both, if we are human.

The family is together for one last time. This is the "once was" and a "might have been." At the end of this episode the chorus has lost hope for the children because of their participation in the inevitable murder (976–7). All the alternatives are eliminated one by one:

- Medea could have stayed in Corinth with her children, but she could not submit to the authority of Creon and his daughter or accept the treachery of Jason.
- She could have gone into exile with the children and entered upon the wretched, dangerous, and often fatal life of a homeless vagabond.
- She could have left the children with Jason, although that never was one of her options.

Jason's desire to be part of a royal *oikos* has allowed him to destroy the family he has, "the living children" as he called them (567). Once involved in the murder the children are not safe: they will be objects of revenge, in real danger from Medea's enemies. They will be accomplices, destroyers of the royal house. Jason is betrayed by himself as much as by Medea, because, having deserted her, he still desperately wants everything to be all right and himself to be in charge.

Nurse wishes away the adventure of the Argo and all that came after it. Jason wishes women did not exist. Medea regrets that she was persuaded by the words of a Greek man. The children are in the way

of these wishes. For the separation to be complete, to be final and irreversible, the children must be dead. The pair of children is the only thing that connects Jason and Medea anymore. And they draw him back for the final scene, in which he voices regret one last time for ever linking his life to Medea.

CHAPTER THREE

? *EX MACHINA*: IF SHE IS NOT A WOMAN, WHAT IS SHE?

> The right ending is an open door you can't see too far out of. It can mean exactly the opposite of what you are thinking.
>
> Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter*

Medea's appearance in the dragon-drawn chariot on the *theologeion*, usually reserved for gods, though the right ending, is an enigma. Are we to think of her as metamorphosed into a *daimôn* or a spirit of vengeance, an Erinys or Mormo (the child-eating Corinthian ogress)? Throughout the play she has been compared to many things more or less than human: a rock, a wave, iron, a bull, a lion. Whatever else she is, lifted up in that alien place, she is also a woman, a human being, one of us, as becomes most clear in the last dialogue between Jason and Medea, where their history together is summed up one last time and their humanity is stressed, though it does not reveal human beings at their best. She will fly away only to rejoin the world of the city, soon, in Athens. This chapter looks at the details of the final scene.

By the end of the play Medea is no longer a daughter, sister, wife, or mother. Her place in the Hellenic social world is gone the same way that her place in the royal Colchian palace is gone. She has alienated the community of women who tried to offer her succour. Stripped of all that makes her human, a social creature, part of the city-state and mistress of the *oikos* she formed with Jason, does she become something else at the end of her stay in Corinth and at the end of the tragedy? We talk of her failed relationships in her natal and conjugal families, betrayer of her father, killer of her brother, discarded wife, and child-murderer. But there is another relationship which does not fail her. She is the granddaughter of Helios, the Sun god, whose gifts protect and empower her.[1] As she loses her human *philoi*, whether by death or

[1] See Harder (1993: 356).

disaffection, she becomes more and more associated with her divine progenitor.

Is she more or less than human? At both ends of the play she is called or compared to a lioness, by the sympathetic Nurse (187) and by the appalled Jason (1342, 1407), though by now he is so far reduced to her former position that even his insults mean nothing to her. "Go ahead and call me a lioness if you like" she taunts (1358). To her Nurse she had been both lioness and bull (in the same mixed metaphor, 187–8). As Nurse sends the children inside to the dead-end[2] of the destroyed house, the danger is felt: the monster lives there in the dark. She has already been spotted eyeing the children with her savage taurine glare. Also at both ends she is even less than animal, a rock or wave (28), a rock or iron (1279). To the chorus she is the Erinys (1260), though Jason ironically calls upon the Erinys to destroy her (1389).[3] To him she is Scylla, destroyer of men at sea, a reference he makes in his last futile attempt to put himself back at the center of what was once *his* adventure story, inadvertently paying homage to her elevated position, but the name is only a taunt, he does not seem to fear that she will actually snatch him up and devour him.[4]

To herself she must be something more. Her divine lineage is suppressed in the prologue and is not brought up until after Creon has left, when (406) she says of herself, "born of a noble father and of Helios, the Sun." The insult to her, that she, granddaughter of Helios, should be treated so high-handedly by these descendants of Sisyphus brings to the fore thoughts of her heritage. Three times she speaks of "Helios, my father's father" (746, 954, 1321) first to Aigeus when she

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[2] See Padel (1990: 343), "What happens in there [in the unseen space of the *skênê/oikos*] is the plot's trapped outcome." See also Padel (1983: 10), "Fantasies about the female interior are interdependent with fantasies both about sacred precincts, especially prophetic sites, and about Hades itself." And further (15), "There was a physical tension between a fictive inside, the palace behind the scene-front, the character behind the mask and an apparent outside, the real space surrounded and perceived by the audience."

[3] At 1333 Jason says τὸν σὸν ἀλάστορ' εἰς ἔμ' ἔσκηψαν θεοί ("The gods hurled your avenger against me"). The scholiast takes *alastôr* as a synonym for *Erinys*. Medea is both the polluted murderer to be hunted by the avengers and the avenger herself (see 1059). What of the children? Jason (1371) believes they exist as the *miastores* for Medea. See Lawson (1964: 468–9) for an interesting take on these various avengers as revenants; on *alastôr* see Holland (2003: 263, 269).

[4] See Gellie (1988: 16), "All these Medeas cannot fail to get in each others' way."

elicits the oath from him,[5] then of the gifts her children will bring to the princess, and finally of the chariot, the gift of Helios to remove his granddaughter from harm and revenge. By the end of the Aigeus episode she has begun her departure from the realm of ordinary humanity. That up to the full description of the princess' death she still wavers between motherhood and divinity makes her final (or perhaps penultimate) transformation of herself all the more dramatic and terrible and at the same time poignant.

How can it be that Medea is free of human justice, after committing these brutal and terrifying crimes? If we look at Medea's words, we find in fact that *she* is the upholder of traditional morality. She is the guardian of marriage and the keeper of oaths. Is she being represented as an old-fashioned hero in a world of fifth-century opportunists (like Jason and his old servant) to whom justice is what you can get away with? Or is it possible that Euripides was showing something else? Men with their petty ambitions and power are out of their element in a world in which divine power and the courage of a human being at the edge are real. Jason, after all, is never called less than human. He may be the worst example of the kind (κάκιστος and παγκάκιστος), but he is always one of them.[6] In the world of the gods, oaths are inescapable and irrevocable. Medea has become the instrument of divine vengeance. Medea the woman is also one of the victims of this retribution and will remain without comfort for the lost children insofar as she remains human; but in her human aspect she will also have the consolation of a new home and family in Athens. In another way she is part of the divine machinery, careless of individual victims, from whom retribution is taken. Human vengeance on her would not have been a satisfying ending: the *Medea* is not a murder trial in a Texas or South Carolina court. And since vengeance belonged not to the state but to the individual families, what greater outrage could be imagined than for her to fall into Jason's hands?[7] The whole play has been a demonstration of his responsibility for the wrongs suffered by his family.

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[5] On Zeus, Helios, and Ge as oath-gods, see Bömer (1960: 81 n. 2). See also Kovacs (1988: 268–70); Dunkle (1969: 99).

[6] Although, when Medea suggests branding him with the *charaktêr*, she does dehumanize him: see Dubois (1982: 112) and (1991: 9).

[7] On the use of the μηχανή as a means of preventing Medea's falling into Jason's hands, see Worthington (1990: 504–5); Rohdich (1968: 68).

> [Medea] regains her power and exalted position only through sundering even more and cutting even deeper through the life which was once formed by him [Jason], her, and the children...The children, whose earlier purpose was to constitute that life and insure its continuance now have no further meaning for her than to serve her in regaining power and to be sacrificed to her exaltation.[8]

Medea in the *mêchanê* is more than human—a natural force, the incomprehensible in nature. In truth there is very little we humans can understand, let alone control, about the randomness of nature, for all our metaphor and science (in some ways inseparable to the ancients).[9] But whatever else she is in that chariot, she is also human.[10] The chariot is fantastic, but its driver is both one of us and other. Her position in the *theologeion*, her command of the supernatural separates her from us.[11] But her words, her feelings, and—as distasteful as it may be for us to admit it—her deeds make her one of us. And she is accepted everywhere she goes. The various attempts whether by other characters or critics to make her something else, more other than a foreign woman with special knowledge and skills only underscore her humanity. She is not a rock or wave. She is only, in one characteristic or another (ferocity, stubbornness, vengefulnness), *like* them at one time and another as any of us could be.

At 1317 we (the audience), the chorus, and Jason see her for the first time up on the roof. Her appearance there in the *mêchanê* along with her imperious, imperative words makes us think that she has metamorphosed (exploded, perhaps) into something *more* than human. She is like Artemis at the end of *Hippolytus* (*Hippolytus* 1297, 1313–4, 1437–9) delighting in the torment she causes and in the knowledge she has, which Jason at least does not share, and in her invulnerability from those who blame her (cf. *Medea* 1360, 1362, 1370, 1386–8, 1398). She remains, also like Artemis (*Hippolytus* 1333, 1398; cf. *Medea* 1361–2,

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[8] Kerenyi (1979: 28).

[9] See Padel (1992: 9 and note), who suggests that in fifth-century Greek scientific thought the literal was not distinguished from the metaphorical. Pre-Aristotelian scientists, she says, "use an image as if the image explained the problematic phenomenon."

[10] See Rehm (2003: 25), "By juxtaposing Helios' chariot with the real sun, Euripides reminds his audience that Medea is not a natural force...but a human who has suffered horribly and acted worse." I am not convinced of the last.

[11] Hatzichronoglou (1993: 179) speaks of Medea as a *theos* at the end and compares her to Dionysus in *Bacchae* (180–7).

1397), vulnerable to the sorrow at the loss of those she loved but would not protect from harm.

The original shock of seeing the flying chariot and its passenger would have worn off during Jason's long tirade (1323–50, to be discussed below). Heroes, after all, receive help from the gods (divine armor, magic hats, flying horses, items which we know and the audience then knew do not exist in our world, where the divine presence is less strongly and personally felt or accepted as either a genealogical or participatory reality): this divine protection is part of their mystique and adds to their κλέος ("glory, fame").[12] Now (after Jason's vituperative speech, 1351 ff.) Medea answers less as a goddess or *daimôn*, but still with gods on her lips. "Zeus knows what you experienced from me and what you did" (1352–3). Throughout, Zeus has been associated with Dikê (158, 764) and Themis as protector of oaths and as keeper of history (1415, 169–70, 208). He is invoked as the one who knows (332, 1352, 1405). Even Jason calls on Zeus to be *his* witness, keeper of *his* story (1405). But until that point it is clear that somehow Zeus has been on Medea's side or at least a co-worker in the punishment of Jason.[13]

Medea's three victims remain Jason, the princess, and Creon. Like Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* (47–50) she has not cared about destroying the innocent along with the guilty. It is, perhaps, not a distinction worth making in her mind. "I have touched your heart as I had to do" (1360): again Medea is like Artemis talking to Theseus (cf. *Hippolytus* 1297, 1313).

> Jason: You too will feel the pain and share in the troubles.
> Medea: Yes, you can count on it, but the pain helps if you do not make fun of me. (1361–2)

Like Artemis (*Hippolytus* 1332–4, 1398) she too both admits the cost to herself and at the same time relishes the sorrow to the man whose loss of loved ones she also laments. But her triumph over his and her enemies' mockery helps her to remain equal to the loss.

The rest of the stichomythia is all too human: more like the bickering of brothers (as in *Phoenissae*, for example) or spouses (as in earlier

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[12] See Smethurst (2002: 21) on the stunning heroic presentation of Medea in the Japanese production, "Ninagawa elevates Medea not only above ordinary women but also above ordinary human beings. She is made to speak like the famous heroes of *kabuki*. If she has any integrity and sense of honor, she must act."

[13] See Kovacs (1993: *passim*, esp. 45, 51, 53, 59); Mikalson (1991: 84); Mastronarde (2002: 32–3); Griffiths (2006: 76).

scenes) than of mortal and god. Jason is reduced to Medea's earlier state, hurling insults which she cannot feel and she is now in his former position of control, hardly elevated in any but the most literal way: "Call me anything you like, you cannot touch me" (1359, 1320). The terrible symmetry of their role exchange is satisfying at the same time that it is deeply sad.

They achieve or at least attempt a line by line equality:

> victims of an evil mother (1363)
> victims of a father's disease (1364)
> not my right hand (1365)
> but your *hubris* (1366)
> You thought it was worth killing them for the bed? (1367)
> Is it a trifling matter for a woman? (1368)
> Yes if she's virtuous. (1369)

At first Medea tries to take the moral high ground: Jason is sick, not from a physical disease, but from perjury and deception of his host/guest; and it is his *hubris* that killed their children.[14]

What is most pathetic is the vanity of Jason's words. Their pledge is now broken altogether. Medea had kept it alive through most of the play in the bodies of the children while they were still living. These children were the last vestige of their history together. Jason abandoned them; he is not to touch them now. Medea in the machine, untouchable, makes visible the gulf between the former husband and wife. In their first scene together, Medea tried to hurt him with words about his promise and betrayal. There was more to their story than just a marriage that could be annulled by a man. They have a history: from the opening of the Clashing Rocks to the killing of Pelias (events once done that cannot be undone: the rocks remain open forever; Pelias, not boiled back to life and youth, remains dead). And Jason foolishly—but he never seems to understand the story he is in—goes back over that past as if *he* were the only player in it, as if he were still the sole central figure in the legend.

> You abomination, you vilest, most hateful woman,
> to the gods and to me and to the whole human race.
> You had the heart to take the sword to your own children
> to whom you gave birth, and you have left me childless and devastated.
> You did these things. How can you still look on the sunlight

[14] On Jason as a source of pollution, see Burnett (1973: 12); Parker (1983: 199).

> and earth, after daring the most appalling deed?
> Damn you. Now I see, I didn't understand it then,
> when I brought you, so hideous a monster, into Greece,
> from your home and that barbarous land,
> betrayer of your father and the country which reared you.
> The gods have hurled you, an avenging spirit against me.
> For you killed your brother at the hearth
> and then boarded the beautiful ship Argo.
> That is where you started. But after marrying
> me and bearing my children,
> because of the marriage bed you killed them.
> There is no Greek woman who would have dared
> such deeds, any of whom I could have married, but instead
> chose you, a marriage made in Hell,
> a lioness, not a woman, with a temper
> more savage than Tyrrhenian Scylla.
> But not even ten thousand curses could
> sting you. Such boldness is in you.
> Go, you depraved murderer of your children.
> What is left to me but to cry out for my fate?
> I will not enjoy my new marriage,
> and the children whom I fathered and brought up
> I will never be able to speak to them alive, but I have lost them. (1323–50)

In the first lines he puts himself in the center ("to the gods and to me and to the whole human race," 1324).

> ἥτις τέκνοισι σοῖσι ἐμβαλεῖν ξίφος
> ἔτλης τεκοῦσα κἄμ' ἄπαιδ' ἀπώλεσας. (1325–6)

> Who dared to wield the sword against your own children,
> you, their mother, and me you have ruined, making me childless.

Everything is here: the children trapped; the reminder that she killed them *because* she was their mother; that she undertook a deed of heroic daring with the sword and that she did it to make him childless. "Your children," he calls them here (at line 1303 he had said "my children," when he had come to rescue them). Of course they are *hers* now because he is making a point of the horror and unnaturalness of the deed. The children are surrounded by their mother, but separating them from her embrace is the weapon and her daring. She had been one with the weapon (1279; cf. 1283, 1325) like Eteocles in *Seven against Thebes* (715), as the chorus implies: ἦσθα πέτρος ἢ σίδαρος ("You were rock or steel"). No longer a restless wave of the sea; her purpose is now fixed.

Jason then separates himself off from the family group κἄμ' ἄπαιδ' ἀπώλεσας (1326), as he is now, *childless* because of her. He had thought

it possible to break the ties which bound him to Medea and their sons. He next expresses his astonishment that she can look on the sun and earth after doing this deed (1327–8). He does not find much help there. Medea too had been surprised at Jason the oath-breaker: does he still believe in the gods he swore by (492–5)? Medea apparently decided not to wait for divine retribution which can take several generations before its swift accomplishment. Jason the oath-breaker and deceiver of guests is seen to prosper, to benefit from his very crime, until she takes action. Jason does not seem to notice that he walked on the earth and looked on the sunlight even after his great impiety and inhumanity.

Jason is granted a recognition of sorts (1329–35). "Now I understand; I didn't then." His recognition of his mistake is practically the same as hers was when she acknowledged that she left home *persuaded* by the words of a Greek man. But she also recognizes that her mistake was uncharacteristic of her.[15] His is typical of him. He has to include a whole series of events as if he is just now seeing what her betrayal of her father and homeland meant: he finally only now comes to realize that it *was* a betrayal, something which Medea and her slave have recognized all along. Before, to his mind she was just helping his cause, through acts of extraordinary sacrifice which he can toss off by saying that it was because she had was passionately in love with him (530–1). And he ends that part of his rebuttal by saying "It's okay, what you did for me," (533, οὐ κακῶς ἔχει). He never noticed what it meant to her at the time and even now does not see what her sacrifices mean to *him*, the obligation, the unbreakable joining of their lives, his own participation, as beneficiary, in each bloody deed.[16] His recognition is narrow, but it is all that he is capable of. He sees that he is ruined and how it happened, but not why. He indicts himself in the eyes of the audience more with every line:

> When from your home and barbarian land
> I brought you with me to a Greek home, a great evil…(1330–1)

That alone, the fact that she is a foreigner whom *he* took from her father's home is enough to make abandonment utterly vile (and to remind us that she has identified exactly this as her mistake too).

> Betrayer of your father and the land which reared you. (1332)

[15] On this see Galis (1992: 76–7).
[16] Gill (1996: 154–74).

That was a human Medea, at least one common enough in folktales and fictions, in legends, and (one suspects) in real life: the girl in love abandons everything for the stranger. Sometimes in Roman moral tales the upright Roman sees what her betrayal of her home or her people means and rejects her. Usually the man accepts her help and she follows him to her ruin. Medea adapts the story to include his ruin too. Theseus the misbegotten son of Aigeus will desert his helpful princess Ariadne: his story will never be read the same way again, now that we know Jason's. Can we see the Athenian hero acting more prudently based on his father's second-hand experience of Medea and not taking his first foreign princess home? In any case this Medea has changed the story to make the man suffer for his betrayal. Every woman must abandon her home and loved ones for the man who comes for her. Legends give us the more interesting examples. Medea makes her own story even more exciting.

> The gods hurled your avenging spirit against me.
> After killing your brother at the hearth you boarded
> the beautiful-prowed Argo. (1333–5)

In blaming her, Jason still does not see how it affects himself, as if the things she did for him, to rescue him, were only hers. But we know that she saved the expedition, that in his helplessness he supplicated her. Medea may be unacceptable, but everyone seems to accept her nonetheless, as long, that is, as she is useful.[17] As the man who profited from her crimes he is also her accomplice.

> That is how you began. (1336)

He always uses "you." But in truth it is how they both began.

> And then marrying this man. (1337)

He points to himself (using the deictic demonstrative). He does not say "me." As if he could be himself and somebody else at the same time. He is thinking of himself as an entity that does not include her, but he is caught: παρ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδε (1337); he is trapped between two participles referring to her and cementing their relationship with marriage and children, νυμφευθεῖσα…τεκοῦσα (1336–7). He has tried to repudiate their marriage but finds himself ensnared in it even now that it is over.

[17] Dunkle (1969: 99) finds even Aigeus motivated by self-interest.

In the next phrase, his new interest in the children makes itself felt: τεκοῦσα <u>μοι</u> τέκνα...(1337). Her motherhood is underscored by the two *tek-* words, but also the word order makes them *his*. In fact he is in the middle of his family for once, almost involved in his life, ironically now that his children are dead and his wife is out of reach.[18] Then he goes back to using "you."

> *You* destroyed them because of the marriage bed.

In his earlier scene with Medea (the second episode) Jason had used "we" of the family (559, οἰκοῖμεν καλῶς; 560, καὶ μὴ σπανιζοίμεθα, "we might live well and not lack for anything"); but then shifts to the first singular: "I would rear; I would place; I would be happy" (562, 564, 565, surely the conjecture of Elmsley at 565, changing the singular to plural, does not make sense: who would be the "we" with Medea and the children in exile?). In their second scene together (the fourth episode), Jason has been so confirmed in his earlier lie that now he is believing it. In that episode he becomes more self-satisfied and expansive in his promises to the children. Of course he will try to get his children released from exile. By then in his mind they are already one big happy family, working together for the benefit of the *patêr* and his *oikos*.

When, in the final scene, Jason accuses Medea of having nothing but sex on her mind he is talking to her as a woman. To him she is a woman like the others only worse—even now that the staging suggests something else. And what is he? Nothing but a Greek man. A Greek man with his Greek friends and Greek legends. He mentions Orpheus in his first harangue (543), not to his credit since legend has it that Orpheus sang the wedding song at the nuptials of Jason and Medea. And Orpheus went to the ends of the earth and beyond for his wife and could not live without her.[19]

> No Greek woman
> would have dared this. (1339–40)

[18] See Sutton (1981: 221), who comments that in family scenes depicted on fifth-century vases the husband is usually shown as "an outsider, or at any rate an observer, of his domestic bliss, rather than an active participant in it." Through his arrangement of words Jason has ironically placed himself in the center of his lost family.

[19] Jason's utter devastation in his final scene wins him the sympathy he did not have earlier in the play (see McDonald, 2003: 102) but at the same time his reference to Orpheus reminds us of what he has failed to do. See Mezzabotta (1994: *passim* and especially 50): the allusion to Orpheus' conjugal fidelity undercuts "the validity of Jason's case."

But in the stories Greek women do sometimes kill their children and in these cases are usually said to be maddened by the gods. Medea does not claim this external justification, the excuse that the chorus gives to Ino. The chorus has stood by, silent collaborators in all but the child-slaying, unable to stop it because it is the perfect ending. Heracles did it too, a male protagonist treated with the depth Euripides gives to his women. He is maddened, but he sees his victims as children, mistaking them for the offspring of his enemy. Not to mention Agave, Prokne, and Althaia. Medea recognizes the hand of gods, but herself accepts the responsibility (1013–4).

In the time it takes for the exodos to be played Jason is turning Medea back into a woman, whatever she may have been in the instant she made her stunning epiphany on the *mêchanê* ("flying machine").[20] He is comparing her to other, Greek, women he might have chosen. Ah, but he did choose one of them when he married the princess. And she hated his children too. There is no break here with the familiar pattern: step-mothers in stories always hate the children of the first wife.

> Instead of them I chose
> to marry you, a marriage that has ruined me. (1340–1)

Here, too, he convicts himself as always. First he displays solipsistic insensitivity: the marriage was more baneful to Medea than it was to him. Which marriage, we might ask, really was his bane? And, then, he stands convicted of an inability to see his own place in the story: he did choose a Greek woman worthy of him. Like a "promiscuous" woman or *any* man, he chose and then chose again. The statement becomes ludicrous when we think he discarded Medea for a rich princess, ἡ τύραννος, as if Medea were a woman and nothing more. And in self-contradiction he then calls her inhuman names:

> a lioness,
> Scylla and worse. (1342–3)

Now she is something less and something more than a woman. Men can be like lions and it does not detract from their heroic stature and humanity. Or does it? In war we may want lions, but not at home.[21]

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[20] McDonald (2003: 103) also reminds us that Medea is a woman and not a monster at the end.

[21] On the lion in the house, Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 716–36.

No Greek woman
would have dared this. (1339–40)

Medea, however, has led the Corinthian women into sympathy with her all along. True, they stop short of assenting to the final act (815), because, she insists, they have not suffered as she has (814–5). Medea has radicalized the chorus before our very eyes. First through her opening speech, at the end of which they agree that it is right (ἐνδίκως, 267) for her to take vengeance on her husband (if not on the king and his daughter, as some editors assert). After Creon leaves—hardly a beloved, kindly king—they express their agreement to her plan for revenge with their first and most radical song[22] celebrating feminist victory in the moral battle for *timê* and *eukleia* ("honor/recompense" and "glory," 415–9) and indeed in a more literal war. Medea, unlike other women, has friends and enemies on her own, not through her husband. She will win *timê* and *eukleia* by defeating her enemies. Men, according to the first choral ode, do not deserve their reputations as superior because they have no *pistis* or *aidôs* ("fidelity" or "respect," 413, 439). They do not meet their sworn obligations (ὅρκων χάρις, 439). The chorus has been able to show some sympathy for the suffering of nearly everybody, even Jason, but most of all for Medea, "unhappy mother" (in a later song, after the children have exited with the murderous gifts, 996–8). These are the Greek women in our story. Others, exodramatic or off-stage, are the daughters of Pelias and Creon's daughter. The former killed their father, persuaded by Medea (no doubt tricked by her, but Euripides does not burden us with that detail). The latter hated Medea's children and needed to be heavily bribed to save them from the often fatal privations of homelessness. Then there is Ino who killed *both* her sons (1289). Ino is the only woman the chorus can think of, but the pretense that they are racking their brains to come up with a name engages the audience[23] in the search for another name (1282). And

[22] Gould (in Silk, 1996: 229) calls the first stasimon "a theatrically stunning proclamation of . . . solidarity."

[23] Newton (1985: 501) writes that Euripides does not "cushion the shock with a catalogue of well-known mythological paradigms. Instead, he drives our sense of horror even deeper by likening the crime to Ino's murder of her two sons, an event which never occurred." And further (502) that Euripides turns Ino into "a small-scale version of the same process" of creating a new myth around Medea. See also Segal (1997: 173–4); Sfyroeras (1995: 135–9); Mills (1976: 123–4). On the aptness of Ino as an example, the significance of her kinship to Jason and the family of Aeolus, and her place in Corinthian cult, see Holland (2003: 272–3).

there are others, not quite parallels, but Jason's claim, so close to this invitation to audience participation, rings false.

There is the feeling that Medea is just as Greek as Jason is;[24] more of a man besides. She has those qualities of rational thought and argumentative skill that are associated with men (and certain other tragic women). There is also the possibility that Medea was originally Greek, and barbarized in tragedy.[25] Edith Hall (35) suggests that her "conversion into a barbarian" was an invention of Euripides himself. Did he turn her into a non-Greek in order to have greater freedom in her construction? "No Greek woman would have done such a thing," becomes a matter of literary choice, rather than a statement of ethnic superiority. Greek women are *sôphrôn* ("prudent") and are perhaps best represented in this drama by Medea's slave; but she is the old nanny and so is probably also foreign, besides being a slave. Even she acts with feminine solidarity in protecting Medea rather than the children. The chorus, too, praises moderation (636–7), but by their silence and inertia they become Medea's co-conspirators. What in Medea's behavior is specifically foreign, rather than exotic or idiosyncratic?

Her adventures, her unorthodox marriage, her knowledge of *pharmaka* (drugs, herbs, poisons), her intelligence, her masculine attitudes: these are the traits special to her. Nothing in the play suggests that they are characteristic of Colchians in general who must be assumed to be like Greeks in everything but language. For dramatic convenience they must be like Greeks in that as well. Medea is unGreek in keeping her oath and in expecting others to keep theirs, at least according to the chorus:

> Gone is the obligation to keep faith and there is no reverence
> abiding in great Greece, but it has flown to the skies. (439–40)

When Jason says of Greek women "in preference to whom I chose you" (1340–1), he is falsifying or intentionally misleading (himself). We do not have a mental picture of Jason looking for a bride among all the Hellenes and then choosing Medea. He picked her up along the way on his plundering adventure. She saved him (476), helped him

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[24] See for example, Knox (1979: 297–301, 309–11); Friedrich (1993: 222); Hatzichronoglou (1993: 186); Just (1989: 269, 275); Barlow (1989: 159); Galis (1992: 73–4); Shaw (1975: 258–9); and recently Lloyd (2006: 115–8, 120–1); see Mastronarde (2002: 22–31) for a thorough discussion of Medea and Greek institutions.

[25] Agamede (*Iliad* 11.741), who knew all the *pharmaka* Earth brings forth, is Peloponnesian and probably Medea's prototype, Hall (1989: 35).

get the Fleece (480–2), and came along. *She* chose *him* and in his panic (indicated by the clutching of hands, 496–8) he vowed his fidelity (and love?) to her. His choosing a Hellenic bride comes later. Again it is a matter of opportunity. Or does she also choose him? It is clear that she only has eyes for him (1146), so much so that she does not even see the children at first (1145). Medea had said of herself "carried off as booty" (256). Everybody knows she was madly in love with him ("with maddened heart" 432; cf. 8, 485) so she is not successfully misleading anyone. It looks as if they are both editing their respective versions of the past in the light of their failures in the present, as everyone does. Any self-presentation is dramatic and creative (as we are reminded from time to time when a memoirist admits to enhancing, or even inventing, certain details of her life, or when we hear a good story-teller narrating an event in which we have taken part—telling a story is a synonym for lying): it is hardly surprising that it should be more so in tragedy, that most self-conscious of art forms. Medea, once she has been discarded, sees herself as just part of the booty. Jason, having made a second choice and after seeing both his marriages go up in smoke, wishes he had made some different "life-decisions."

> A lioness, not a woman, with a nature
> more savage than the Tyrrhenian Scylla. (1342–3)

"A lioness" like Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon* 1258). Earlier she had given the look of a lioness with cubs (187) whenever anyone stepped near her to offer solace. But a lioness with cubs is protective. Medea hates her children (36, though this changes from minute to minute; when they are not there she seems able to forget they exist). What is she protecting? Herself, perhaps, from the soft words that are the undoing of the men in the play (see 188), for she cannot allow anyone to raise her out of her tragic desolation, at least until after the departure of Aigeus. Though Jason calls her lioness and Scylla, he is still addressing her as a woman and not something more terrifying that could reach down and grab him. He has never shown himself to be that brave. Or is he still unable to see what their relationship is?

> But not with a million insults
> could I sting you: such boldness is in your nature. (1344–5)

Of course, their situations are now reversed from where they stood in the second episode, not that he is able to comprehend it. And what can he come up with compared to her stinging taunts? She saved his life,

as she hissed in his face; she killed the dragon. She killed Pelias. All he could answer then was "I married you and brought you to Greece," where he deserted her and made her three times an exile (from Colchis, from Iolcus, and from Corinth). The other reproaches do him no credit. Reminding her of her foreign origins gives no glory to the Greeks.

> Go, criminal and murderer of your children. (1346)

All he can say in addition to name-calling is "go." She could say at the end of their first encounter on stage "go back to your bride" (623–4) and here "go and bury your bride" (1394).[26] Jason, the failure, fails even at vituperation.

> All that's left for me is to bewail my fate
> because I will never enjoy my new marriage
> and the children I fathered and reared
> I will not be able to address as living, but I have lost/destroyed them. (1347–50, cf. 1338)

> You destroyed them because of the marriage bed.
> Do you think it is a small thing for a woman? (1367–8)

The *Medea* has made it clear that marriage is everything to a woman. But the question and answer are important here because they establish that Medea is a woman and is both thinking of herself as a woman and is thought of by others as a woman.[27] However much we say that she is something more, a demon of revenge, a goddess or monster, or that she has given up her humanity, she is still human, still a woman.[28] A woman *and*...everything else she has been or been said to be.

> They are dead. This will sting you.
> They are μιάστορες ["pollution-causers" or "avengers"] to your head.
> The gods know who started the wrong.
> Then they know your abominable (lit. spat out) mind.

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[26] In the Ninagawa production, Smethurst (2002: 30) records that Jason is assigned the role of a female mourner.

[27] As Segal says in his fine article on *Medea* and violence (1996: 39), "Despite the elements that tend to demonize Medea at the end...her tragedy remains a feminine tragedy, defined by her relation to the house and to children, birth, nurture, and burial." See also Lawrence (1997: 54), "Here the realistic Medea spills over into the epilogue, and the relevance is preserved (and indeed enhanced) by the figurative dimension of the scene."

[28] Galis (1992: 79), does not agree, "what Medea cannot do and remain a woman is kill, with iron-clad and clear-headed resolve, children whom she loves."

Hate and I, too, hate your bitter babbling.
And I yours. The divorce is easy. (1370–5)

In this exchange Medea initiates every couplet. Jason can only follow, as he had done before, answering her speech point by point with sophistries (e.g. "it wasn't *you* who saved me"). He cannot even come up with a verb on his own. The separation is easy! Hardly so. Medea did not find it so (236).

What now shall I do? I am more than willing. (1376, cf. 1040)

Why does she say this? She is agreeing to the separation. But is this not also a taunt to Jason? To give him the opening so that she can deny his request to touch the children.

Let me bury these bodies and lament them. (1377)

One aspect of the story reviewed and summed up here in the exodos is the feminization of Jason and the destruction of his seed.[29] Medea like the abominable Furies (called ἀπόπτυστοι, "spat-out," by Apollo, *Eumenides* 191; cf. ἀπόπτυστον, *Medea* 1373) also delights in cruel punishments and deaths (see *Eumenides* 186–92): boiling, cutting up, dissolving in fire. The festivals that delight in stories of such murderous doings are those devoted to tragedy. Jason is left to bury his dead, to do what the women of the family usually do. But he will not bury his dead sons whom he calls μιάστορες ("polluters, avengers," 1371): he is not to touch them. Is Medea preventing his acquiring power from them?[30] Or is she protecting them from the pollution of his perjury?[31]

No way, for I shall bury them with this hand! (1378)

this is the hand she apostrophized earlier, the hand that stabbed them, and the hand she fondled them with while they were still alive, and that touched and was touched in supplication.

Taking them to the precinct of Hera Akraia
so that no one of my enemies will outrage them,
tearing up their graves. (1379–81)

[29] Moreau (1986: 110), "elle castre son époux."
[30] As David Jordan suggests (in private correspondence) there is a positive side to *miasma*.
[31] See Parker (1983: 199) on perjury as causing inherited guilt. On Medea's refusal to admit pollution see Parker (1983: 314–5).

The order shows that she still sees them surrounded by hostile forces: τις > αὐτούς < πολεμίων, that is, so that no enemy may get them in his control. In contrast with her now defeated enemies she is a victorious warrior, holding her spoils in her chariot (like Amphiareus in *Phoenissae* 1110).[32] Hera protectress of marriage, jealous guardian of marital fidelity will watch over these children, sacrificed to the sanctity of marriage and the inviolability of oaths. But that is only one strain in the story.

If Medea's reference to the cult "zooms"[33] the audience into the present and their known world, it must also be a bit difficult for them to get the focus right. Medea has killed the children and will herself establish the cult.[34]

> And for this land of Sisyphus
> I shall set up a sacred festival and cult
> for the future in return for this impious murder. (1381–3)

How are we to adjust the focus and make sense of what we are seeing or hearing? In atonement for this crime, the cult requires the Corinthians to give up their children for a year to serve in the temple. But Medea murdered the children. It was not an accident. She has, it is true, forced others into sharing the responsibility, Jason for his *hubris*, Creon and his daughter for the marriage and exile. Σεμνήν ("sacred," 1382) balances δυσεββοῦς ("impious," 1383), somehow making up for it. But *others* will atone for Medea's murder of her children. The ritual is the closure of the other story to which both Medea and Jason allude, in which the Corinthians killed these children. Up to the end Jason has no idea that Medea would kill them (and even seems stunned by the thought that she might have in mind to kill him). He comes to rescue

[32] Mills (1976: 124) reveals how complex and enigmatic the final scene is and suggests four simultaneous ways of seeing the figure of Medea in her chariot: a murderess displaying her victims; a sacrificial priestess with her offerings; a goddess bearing the bodies of heroes to their sacred tomb; a mother cradling the bodies of her children.

[33] On "zooming" see Sorviniou-Inwood (in Clauss and Johnston, 1997: 255) and Sourvinou-Inwood (in Pelling, 1997: 161 ff.). On the problematic relationship between texts and the real world through rituals and aetiologies, see Dunn (1994: 103–4, 111–5); also Mikalson (1991: 84).

[34] See Zerba (2002: 332), "Ritual is not only exposed as a rhetorically shaped accommodation but as an action whose capacity to mediate between the divine and the human is gutted by an actor whose 'character' is a self-disclosing series of improvisations that bridge the scale from victim to victimizer."

them from relatives of the royal family (1303–5), as if to remind us even at the end of the other version.

Why does Euripides break the illusion by alluding to other versions and even by making his audience expect the *ekkyklêma* (revolve or platform on wheels which would show the result of an interior slaughter scene unseen by the audience, 1314–5) when he was in fact using the *mêchanê* (flying machine) or at least a rooftop epiphany? Of course it makes a better story, much tighter, with no extraneous last-minute characters. Distant relatives of Creon are not part of this story: he is alone with his daughter. No other family members would suit the tragic economy. He and his daughter form a pair, he- and she-tyrants. Nothing in the play is more jarring than the reference to a cult which exists, but which only makes sense according to another version of this polysemous story.

Medea announces the rites to Jason, but also to the women of the chorus and to the audience. To Jason it is part of her triumph: her ownership of the children, her denial to him of any part in them, her protection of them against the Corinthians (only they are already dead before being taken to the temple for asylum, where in another version they are killed by the Corinthians).[35] Her announcement is more personal to the chorus. Is she giving them the comfort of a cult that will allow them to atone for their part in all that has happened? They co-operated in the murders first through sympathy and agreement with the justice of her vengeance on Jason, next by their promise of silence and collusion with her plans, by their inability to act at the crucial time (manifested by their saying "shall we help?" and the children's begging them to do so, 1275–8). By being there they are complicit in knowledge. At the critical time they pray to Earth and Sun and the prayer is addressed to efficacious gods as it turns out (1251–2). But Medea, the hero, the daughter of a son of the Sun and Medea the expert in the *pharmaka* that earth brings forth has more intimate and effective contact with Ge and Helios than do the women of the chorus.[36]

What is she in this final scene? Somewhere between heaven and earth, between the chthonian and transitional gods she worships at her hearth and works with in her magic and the majestic gods of the sky,

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[35] For a good summary of earlier versions, see McDermott (1989: 9–24).

[36] Even though Helios was central to Corinthian worship, he does not answer the women's prayer; see Mikalson (1989: 85–6).

Helios, Zeus, and Hera[37] (the former two, much on her lips). Among the nightmare figures that frightened children and even caused their deaths was Mormo, also a Corinthian woman turned demon. According to the legend Mormo killed her children, ate them, and flew away.[38] Is she all things between heaven and earth: lion, rock, human, *daimon*, fury? Something more than human? A free spirit: a woman without children, husband, home, friends, or country, lacking all the associations that make one human and a social creature?

And as she continues, the mixture of roles, of essences, becomes even more confused.[39] As hero, she establishes the cult. But then she is a woman again:

> And I myself will go to the land of Erechtheus
> to live with Pandion's son Aigeus. (1384–5)

When she alights from her car in Athens she will be a wife (or consort) again. She will have a city and home. And at some point she will bear a royal son, as she promised, to Aigeus. She has achieved (and will have achieved) what Jason hankered for: royal patronage, a royal child, and conspicuous glory. She will live with Aigeus in a reciprocal relationship in which what she has to offer is valued or—because this variation in the story fights with others, at times struggling to emerge—would have been valued if Aigeus had not betrayed his promise and disobeyed the oracle so that once again Medea will have to fly away. That they were known to have stayed together long enough for Theseus to come of age says something about Aigeus and about the acceptance of Medea wherever she goes.

And then she is something more again, if not more than human—at least a specially gifted human being—when she predicts the future authoritatively:

[37] On possible chthonic aspects of the cult of Hera Akraia see Menadier (1996: 175); on the cult of Medea's children, *ibid.* 188–96.

[38] See Sarah Iles Johnston's haunting paper (1997: esp. 62–8).

[39] See Zerba (2002: 315–37) on the variety of Medea's roles. "The fascination *Medea* has exerted on audiences since its first production in 431 B.C.E., which not surprisingly troubled the judges who awarded it third place, has much to do with Euripides' creation of his heroine as a *hypokrites*: an actor, answerer, interpreter of the tradition, rhetorical virtuoso, and consummate dissimulator" (319). And further (326), "Euripides' improvisational treatment of the myth may easily be seen in terms of stage action as the improvisation of his principal, the willful seizing by the character-as-actor upon an innovation that breaks with tradition."

> And, as is fitting, you, a bad man, will die a bad death
> struck on your head by a remnant of the wreck of Argo
> seeing a poignant end to your marriage with me. (1386–8)

Their fates are finally disengaged. Jason, still in the dark, seems to take this prophecy as a curse on himself and reciprocates with: "May the Erinys of children and *dikê* of murder (homicidal justice) destroy you (1389–90)," giving Medea the opportunity in closing the story to remind him of their beginning, of the oaths to which he was false, of the stranger he deceived (1391–2). His name-calling does him no good.

> Go home and bury your wife. (1394)

He is reduced to the role of a (Greek) woman, handling the body, lamenting his loss, longing to touch the children, supplicating (if only he could), but she is out of reach.

> In vain the word is cast out. (1404)

He is a pathetic figure, disempowered. Does he deserve it? That is what she implies, but nobody deserves such misery. Better never to have been born. The chorus can only stand there in amazement.

Medea nunc sum. (Seneca, Medea *910)*

According to Margaret Williamson (1990: 29), "The possibility of true speech by and about women remains, like the domain from which Medea emerged, off-stage."

I believe that Euripides has come close to giving voice to this woman at least, not that many women are like Medea. But in the play a woman's voice is heard. It is a true voice because it includes many voices: a woman as mother, as wife, as bride, as sister, as daughter, as dependent, and as a free entity. A woman as a hero and as a powerful goddess.[40]

[40] Stein (2003: 115), writing about Deborah Warner's production *Medea*, says of the line "Ladies. Corinthians. I'm here," with which Medea makes her first appearance, "The blatant sarcasm and bright, bright irony of that salutation caused an eruption of laughter in the audience. Suddenly, although she may be a killer as well as the grandchild of the Sun god, she is genuinely one of us. She immediately becomes a mass of contradictions, a personality and a character full of complexity, a creature of infinite variety. Her grief, her intelligence, her catalogue of emotions ever-present and endless, all of these and more will inform her traffic with us."

Can she be something of a redemptive figure for all women mistreated in marriage, silenced by men? Other women cannot have her powers, and rarely want to emulate her success, but anyone can *fantasize* a perfect revenge. As suits the tragic genre, her situation is worse than the usual, her deeds more horrible, and her escape is better, more final. Her voice is dangerous because it is true.

Without the political aspect the play would be demeaned: it is not just a melodrama about a woman scorned. It shows what it means to be without a city and without a home. The play is about jealousy, but that is not enough. It is about revenge and rage. But above all it is about justice. Medea in her dealings with men gains insights into *men*'s relationships with their children. She elicits from Creon a priorities list: children first and then country (329), a significant ranking for a king, especially one named Creon. And Medea teaches Jason that he does love his children.

Her alterity does not frighten us as much as her familiarity does. There is no protection from the elemental and no use to anticipate or fear it. The Athenians dismissed her, perhaps, by placing the play last in a contest of three (the other contestants were Sophocles and possibly an Aeschylean revival put on by his son). Many critics (of earlier years) dismissed her by saying she is not tragic. At the end she is beyond us. But before that she had moved among us and been part of the community. Tragic characters are often people at the edge, but they show us what we are. It is disturbing that Medea should do this, but the real-life cases of parents murdering their children are too common for us to deny this dark side of humanity.[41] The story of Medea itself becomes our protection from the Medea within us, if not from the Medea among us.

What is she? Many things at once, a creature of extraordinary power, because undifferentiated. The woman from the dark interior emerges into the light. A woman takes charge of the burial of her children. A woman is carried away from danger with the assistance of her paternal grandfather to become another man's wife (or mistress). A triumphant warrior hero shows how scary the heroic code can be with its inability to keep apart the distinction between friends and enemies and the deadly

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[41] See Corti (1998: 1), "the theme of infanticide in literature is a reflection of the actual human experience of violent hostility toward children." Also, "Medea's 'victory' is disturbing precisely because it dramatizes a psychological development that is all too recognizable" (30). She also wisely speaks of war "as deferred infanticide" (25).

consequences of that failure (Achilles causing the deaths of many of his compatriots and of the man he most loved; Ajax in Sophocles' play betraying his wife, child, brother, and men; Antigone forgetting the man who loved her and abandoning him to his death). The heroic appetite is tragic but we need it to give meaning to our own more mundane failures and tragedies. Medea is one of its best examples, one of its most tragic victims and most damning critics. She embodies it in order to destroy it in the general nihilism.

There is in Medea something not human. Sub- or super- is hardly relevant.[42] Gods' appetites are often insatiable, their actions unjust, vicious, sadistic. What they are is *other*. We cannot have our way with them. That is the difference. Things happen that human beings cannot control or understand. A feeble attempt is made through cult or theology or tragedy until the next cosmic outbreak.

At the end Medea is everything at once.

Medea escapes/Euripides lets her escape because she can/because he can. Both assert godlike control over the fates of the characters in the story. Both change the story to claim it as their own. Both can summon the *mêchanê*/magic chariot simply because it is needed now. The powerful closing, visually and morally astonishing, with which playwright and hero leave us, explodes the structures based on polar opposites into a chaos that is all the more frightening because it has form and reason.[43] The worst evil is not random or unreasoned. The worst evil is logical, carefully planned, and carried out methodically.

> Medea superest—hic mare et terras vides
> ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina. (Seneca, *Medea* 166–7)
> Medea remains—here you see sea and earth,
> iron and fire, gods and bolts of lightning.

[42] Lawrence (1997: 55) writes, "Morally is there anything to choose between the superhuman and the subhuman?"

[43] "Euripides," says Lawrence (1997: 54–5), "undermines the holiest of polarised distinctions by actually reifying in a visual metaphor the idea that a mortal may be demonic." See also Smethurst (2002: 26), on the finale as mitigating the murder by transporting Medea to another world. On accepting the chaos of Medea, see Griffiths (2006: 79–80); also 117, "We can't pin her down, so she keeps moving and growing." McDonald (1992: 121) writes of Tony Harrison's "magpie nest of Medeas"; see also 116 on the multiplicity of Medeas.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEDEA AND HER CHILDREN

> Susan Smith is defined publicly only by the crime.
> Stephen Bright, Atlanta attorney

> It's very frustrating that I can't tell her story now.
> If I could, the public would take a different view.
> David Bruck, Susan Smith's attorney[1]

> That's the way it is. That's what it has come to.
> They're at pains to assure that even
> posterity will call me a child-murderess.
> Christa Wolf, *Medea* (tr. by John Cullen)

In all our minds Medea is defined by her crime. But it was not always so. In earlier versions of Medea's legend the children were killed either by accident or by the Corinthians. Even if Neophron's version[2] in which Medea herself kills her children antedates that of Euripides, the filicide was still associated with Euripides' version, so much so that he was accused of taking a bribe to transfer the murder from the Corinthians to Medea. This chapter looks in detail at the powerful farewell scene between Medea and her children just before they are sent into the black hole of the house to be murdered; an appendix gathers the many places in which these children are threatened and ensnared, whether from the outside world or by their nearest kin or by the language itself. By going over the speech line by line and word by word I hope to bring into focus the kind of tools the ancient poet had at his disposal to keep the past alive in the present and to show the heroic temper divided.[3]

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[1] Attorneys Bright and Bruck are quoted in "Two Crimes, Two Punishments," by Rick Bragg, *New York Times*, Section E, p. 5, January 22, 1995.

[2] For fragments of Neophron's *Medea* see http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/neophron.shtml and http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/neophronnotes.shtml. See Michelini (1989: *passim*) on the relation of the versions.

[3] On Medea's divided self see Foley (1989: *passim*).

The Farewell Scene[4]

Medea:
I will do that. But go into the house
and prepare for the children what they need for today.
Children, children, you have a city
and a home in which, when you have left me to my misery,
you will dwell forever deprived of a mother.
And I will go to another country, a refugee,
where I cannot delight in you or see you happy.
I will never adorn your nuptial bath and bride
and marriage bed nor hold up the wedding torch.
My own daring has wrecked my life.
Dear, dear children my care for you has gone to waste!
What a waste the toils which wore me down,
when I endured the hard useless pangs of childbirth.
Truly once, sad as I am now, I had high hopes
in you, that you would care for me in my old age
and when I died, with your own hands you would tend me,
something we all crave. But now it's all gone,
my sweet expectation. For without you
I will live a life of sorrow, agonizing for me.
And you, with those dear eyes of yours, will never again
look at your mother, when you have gone away to another life.
Ah! Ah! Why are your eyes staring at mine, children?
Why do you smile that very last smile?
Ah, Ah! What will I do? My heart is not in it,
women, when I look at the gleaming eyes of my children.
I could not do it. Goodbye my plans
of before. I shall take my children with me.
Why should I abuse them to wound their father,
and have twice as many woes myself?
I will not do it. Goodbye my plans.
But what is the matter with me? Do I want to be
a laughing stock, letting my enemies go unpunished?
These things must be endured. Damn my cowardice!
How could I let soft words into my heart?
Go into the house, children. Whoever
is not permitted to partake of my sacrifice
stay away. I shall not let my hand grow slack.

[4] Diggle (1984: *ad loc.*) deletes the last 25 lines, but Kovacs (1986) has restored them, deleting only 1056–64. See Lloyd-Jones (1980); Stanton (1987); Dyson (1987); Mastronarde (2002: 330–46 *ad* 1002–80). Most commentators call this a monologue, but Medea is speaking to children who are present on stage. Though they do not speak, they affect what is said and done.

Ah. Ah.
Do not, oh my heart, do not do these things.
Let them alone, you miserable woman, spare your children.
Living there with me they will delight you.
No! By the avengers down in Hades!
There is no way that I will leave my children
to be abused by my enemies.
[They must die. And since they must,
I will kill them who gave them birth.][5]
The plan is underway and she will not escape.
The crown is on her head; dressed in the robes,
the royal bride is dying; I am certain of it.
Now I shall set out upon a most sorrowful road
and I shall send them on one more sorrowful still.
I want to speak to my children. Dear children,
give your mother your right hand to kiss.
Dearest hand, dearest mouth,
and form and noble face of my children,
may you be happy, but there. Your father has spoiled
everything here. Sweet embrace
Soft skin and lovely breath of my children.
Go, go on. I cannot bear to look at you
any more. I am overcome by wrongs.
I understand what evil I am about to do
but my wrath is stronger even than my thoughts,
which is the cause of the greatest wrongs of humankind. (1019–80)

Since a play moves forward scene by scene, each following in time from the one before, from beginning through middle to end, only one thing can happen at a time on stage. Euripides' theatre did not allow for a voice-over or a flashback except in speech, moving in time from one thing to another, though the order may not always be straightforward and often is not. In her great dialogue with the silent and, we assume, largely uncomprehending,[6] but not necessarily unresponsive, children, Medea goes through sequentially the many things she has on her mind and reveals some, at least, of the many Medeas she is at once, as she battles now with her maternal self and again with her heroic self.[7] Sometimes she misses the connections which many philologists, like logicians,

[5] Most editors delete these lines because they are repeated at 1240–1, where they are more effective, especially if spoken for the first time.
[6] See Sifakis (1979: 69) on tragic children's lack of understanding of what is happening to them.
[7] See Gabriel (1992: 349 *et passim*) on the "ethic of care" v. the "ethic of justice."

more at home with philosophical dialogue than drama, need to have made for them.[8] The faults in logic are easily corrected by excision.[9] But perhaps it is possible that this scene of wild and frantic fluctuation is Euripides' way of overcoming the limits of dramatic necessity bound in time. Some difficulties would, of course, become less uncomfortable if we were certain about gesture and tone and stage business with the children. The children are sent into the house, but they could not go if Medea pulls (or calls) them back before they reach the door. In the opening scene the children are delayed at the door by the Nurse. They are kept in the liminal space where Greek drama takes place, where oddly they are safe, before being sent into the dark interior place where undramatic violence is done.[10]

If a character is serious and not a fanatic or psychopath, she or he will often be of different minds about nearly anything of importance, especially if a course of action is required.[11] And Medea, if she is to maintain any credibility, must be of divided minds regarding her children.[12] We would feel very little compassion for her if she did not love these children, if killing them meant as little to her as lightening her

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[8] As Corti (1998: 32) aptly says, "the truth of tragedy does not lie in the construction of rational argument; it lies in the presentation of emotional realities." We must make sense of the passages in question, but that sense may be dramatic, emotional, logical, and a combination of all of these.

[9] But see Dyson's comment (1987: 34), without this passage "we never see Medea unreservedly loving her children, as the action of the play demands if we are to feel her as tragic."

[10] Is violence undramatic? The children's cries are heard as they are slaughtered inside. It would hardly be more pitiful, but more shocking to actually see them being killed. But one reason is that the chorus could not stand around questioning whether to help if the murders took place on stage; they would have to do something. One of the functions of the chorus is to serve as a naive audience, not recognizing that this is a play in which watchers cannot interfere. The door to the unseen space is a real barrier.

[11] We see the less than brilliant Aigeus weighing the possibilities before taking the action of offering Medea asylum: 1. For the sake of the gods (720): this is, perhaps, the negative argument. If he refuses he is failing in *aidôs* toward the suppliant. 2. For the sake of children (721): this is the positive side. She has promised to help him produce an heir and he believes in her abilities. 3. There is the consideration of his relations of *xenia* or political *philia* with Creon and the Corinthians. He is careful not to give offense (730). The point is that he goes through the pros and cons and comes to a decision that is the right one. Creon has made a decision to exile Medea. He is not shown to be an ethically weighty person. He will not listen to reason. All his arguments are personal. Jason, too, made his decision to marry the princess only from the personal motivation of greed or prestige without weighing the consequences.

[12] Papadopoulou (1997: *passim*) comments on the uniqueness of this passage, in which we are "transferred into her mind" (649). "Medea loved her children, she hesitated to

baggage before her trip to Athens. At the same time she is ambivalent about them. We have been told that she hates her children (36). But one can only express one's different minds in words which have a temporal quality, however swift and vanishing (or, in Greek, *winged*) they may be. In this great experimental scene Euripides is expressing the swiftness of thought: not merely logical thought, but emotional thought as well.[13]

Medea sends the aged *paidagôgos* inside and addresses her children:

> Oh children, children. (1021)

The two children are seen together, and then embraced one by one in this pathetic repetition.

> For you there is a city
> and a home. (1021–2)

Is it the city of Corinth and a home in the royal family, as they might believe from the mission to the palace, or the city of the dead and a home in Hades? Corinth (or the promontory where Hera Akraia was celebrated) as it turns out is to be their final destination, their resting place, and another place to which Medea will not be able to return in the flesh.[14]

> In which after leaving unhappy me
> you will dwell (have an *oikos*) forever deprived of your mother. (1022–3)

This is a chilling passage: a mother settling her children's future, as if there were a future open to them, before killing them. But *they* are not leaving; even in the fictitious alternative invented by Medea they are staying behind. And yet along the sad journey they will take (from the interior of her house to Hades, 1068) there will be no chance of the

kill them and this could not be better proved than by presenting the innermost workings of her mind which seem unable to lie" (651).

[13] Jason tries to give a logical argument defending his betrayal of Medea. We see how futile is was on his part. He was not able to take into account the complex reality even of himself, let alone others. Logic plays little part in decision-making in real life and generally leads to bad decisions if relied on primarily. Flesh and feelings and history cannot be disregarded or reduced to logic.

[14] Surrogates will atone for her children's deaths, showing that she is not the only one responsible. As Corti (1998: 32) movingly puts it, "What is remarkable about the play is not the animosity of any particular individual toward the children, but the way in which all visible social structures and sanctions seem to conspire against the children." One might think of Solon's story of Cleobis and Biton, who died in Hera's temple for their mother's honor and were awarded a statue in Delphi.

return just suggested by the aged minder (1015). There is no thought of "wait for me here/there and prepare a home for me." That is not to be Medea's fate. She could, like Admetus (*Alcestis* 363–4), have said something like that if she had wanted to deceive her children or if she had wanted to keep them as part of her life as he wants to keep his wife alive. Medea cannot afford to keep her children as part of her life. Their death is to be a finality, not the life-in-death imagined for Alcestis by Admetus. In the parallel story offered by the chorus Ino with her children hand in hand will step over the edge (1282–9).

> But I will go to another land, an exile. (1024)

Their lives once united now separate. She, the keeper of the hearth and protector of the children, faithful to Jason's *oikos* has been put out, made a homeless wanderer. What life could she have if she had been the ordinary, submissive woman Jason takes her to be at the end of their marriage, or the clever but limited woman Creon assumes she is? A beggar foisted off on "friends" of Jason's.[15] She had been rendered socially nothing by Jason at the end of the second episode, when he wished women did not exist and also before that by his abandonment and rejection of her and of their children and by his preference for royal power; and especially when he implies that neither of them needs any more children (as if that were all she were good for). The place she had in the interior of the stage building representing a woman's house, no longer the *oikos* of Jason, is empty. "There is no house" (139, οὐκ εἰσὶ δόμοι): though we see the façade of a house, these words of the Nurse are no exaggeration. It is a building, but without Jason and after the demise of their marriage it is not an *oikos*. The children are abandoned, sacrificed to the potential for other children. Jason imagines children to be born who will cement his connection to the royal house. What is potential is never real and in a tragedy is unlikely to become real. Jason in his search for security has not, after all, taken the safest route.[16]

On the other hand Medea is not to be a homeless refugee. Before the fourth episode, she has made arrangements to go to another house,

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[15] Consider the woman Heracles brings to Admetus' house. She is to be a woman serving in the house and at the service of the master (*Alcestis* 1024; 1049–56). Medea in fact makes her own arrangements and she will become Aigeus' concubine (*Medea* 1384–5).

[16] On Jason's quest for "fixity" see Sale (1977: 13–34).

to achieve what Jason thought he had achieved but will lose, has in fact already lost by the time these (true) words (1024) are spoken: royal protection, a royal marriage, royal sons, all are deliberately denied to Jason at the end. We will soon learn that by the time these words were spoken, the bride was in her death throes. We know this from the measuring of time by the distance, how long it takes a walker to go six plethra (1181–2),[17] not as far as from the palace to Medea's house.

In giving her children back to Jason (even falsely) Medea has deserted them too and, in making arrangements for herself without them, has separated their fates from her own. In the third episode (just before she tells the chorus her murderous plans) both Aigeus and Medea had been so obsessed with their own concerns that Medea's children are not even mentioned. What else is the fate of fatherless children with no kin, abandoned by their father who can stand to see them walk off into the void without home or city while he enjoys a luxurious existence in the royal palace? Why did he not claim them before? Because they are not wanted in the arrangements he made with Creon and his daughter. Nor are they wanted in Medea's new association (structurally a marriage, in the less legalistic system that prevailed in the heroic age)[18] with Aigeus for the purpose of bearing a child to him (or helping him get a child, if that is to be construed as something different). Her children would be the unwanted stepchildren in either house. In the heat of her crisis to find asylum for herself, she has forgotten them or mentally disposed of them already. Is this why they are not mentioned in the Aigeus scene? Like *Alcestis*, only in reverse, *Medea* is in part an exploration of marriage and family, that is, what constitutes an *oikos*. In her mind perhaps her sons are already dead as early as the third episode.[19]

> [I will go]
> before getting enjoyment from you and seeing you happy,
> before decking out your bridal bath and wife and wedding
> couches and holding up the torch. (1025–7)

Medea had shortly before suggested lighting the torch and standing by the bed of the new wife of Jason (886–8), like the mother of the

[17] See Page's note (1938: *ad loc.*) on ἐκπλέθρου.

[18] Easterling in Pelling (1997: 21–37); especially cogent are her remarks on the use of "heroic vagueness" (25–6).

[19] Papadopoulou (1997: 647) says of lines 1024–37 that the children are already dead in their mother's mind. But their virtual death may come sooner. The chorus pictures the murder in the third stasimon.

bride. She has also just sent gifts to her former rival (956). Are they items from her own (informal) dowry which Jason advises her not to alienate? Are they to become part of the new bride's dowry, valuables of which she has no need as the king's daughter, because her dowry is Corinth? Medea had also, with pretended enthusiasm, in the previous scene accepted the new alliance as if she had been part of the planning and were acquiring a new member of the family. Is she, in her inimitable way, distorting all family relationships? Or is she simply imitating Jason in his distortion of them in taking a wife in addition to her, to be, as she says, her mistress?

Here, she is playing the role of mother to her children, regretting, as Alcestis does, having to miss major events in her sons' lives, but for a very different reason. She evokes rituals of the bath, bed, and wedding torches in her lamentation for the deaths of her children (1026–7), recalling in a chilling way the laments of other mothers for their lost sons or daughters when they die before reaching the passage into adulthood that marriage represents, a culminating rite for a mother when she says goodbye to her children before giving them into the care of another woman or into another man's *oikos*. Marriage always comes to mind when the young die, marriage to death.[20] The two passages surrounding this scene—her sending the children off with gifts to the nameless Glauke's chambers and the messenger's speech describing their presence there—tell of other partings that have already happened in real time.

> Oh unhappy me for my boldness! (1028)

She calls herself back from her woolgathering about a future that will never be. She cannot be a mother and a hero. Αὐθαδία (1028, "boldness") is not a mother's virtue. The physical presence of the children, their present existence and memories of their past, have made her regret the action and the essence she has chosen for this time that will cancel their predictable future, in order to complete the action that is this tragedy. The children were handed over to their father in order to kill his new wife, and now are brought back to their mother to be killed. It is one movement in the drama, interrupted here for Medea's farewell to her little sons.

[20] See Rehm (1989: 97–115) and (1994).

But she *is* both a hero and a mother. The presence of the children combined with her use of them in her heroic (feminine, yet still grand and glamorous) revenge makes the turbulence of her thinking, that is displayed in this disturbing speech, inevitable. A man uses shield, sword, and spear. The weapons (both defensive and offensive) which she has at her disposal, instead of men's implements of war (though she kills them with a sword) are her children. That distinction was established in the first episode. War is for men what childbearing is for women. And this is another, less positive, aspect of her feelings toward the children. They would grow up to be men and warriors, allies of her enemies.[21] They are Jason's children and they are cursed through him because of his perjury.[22] The talk of their marriages must remind her of her own and the risks of marriage in general for a woman, about which she had talked to the chorus. Her boldness is related to marriage and childbearing (1048; cf. 248–51): in this lies her heroism. No wonder children are at risk (as the chorus sings in its next song, especially at 1109–11). Does this mean that Euripides affirms the Athenian democratic ideology,[23] by showing children held hostage to a dangerous mother with aristocratic masculine ideals? I do not think it is so straightforward: Medea's αὐθαδία ("stubbornness") is the only thing that can save her from homelessness, poverty, and probable death.

The fact of exclusion and denial of a voice or rights is what drives her to these extremes.

> In vain I reared you, my children,
> in vain I toiled and was worn down by labors
> enduring hard [barren] agonies of childbirth. (1029–31)

The "cruel" (στερρᾶς, 1031) pangs of birthing are now "barren" (another meaning of στερρᾶς) because the children will die. Her heroism *was* in motherhood. One childbirth is equal to standing in battle three times (250–1). Her πόνοι ("labors," 1030) are like Heracles' more famous Labors, but hers are within her own body. And besides giving

[21] See Griffiths (2006: 52) "She is able to label the children as 'Jason's', and thus the children she kills are at that moment not viewed as 'hers' but 'something of her enemy'."

[22] Holland (2003: *passim*, esp. 270–2) points out that the children are also inheritors of the family curse of the Aeolids: "Medea's realization that her sons, who belong to Jason by Greek custom, are tainted by their father's family connections…is an important factor in her decision to kill them" (271).

[23] See Scharffenberger (1999: 9–10).

birth twice she slew the dragon, saved the Argonautical adventure, and killed the usurping king Pelias. Now she is in the midst of killing the tyrants (which is going on in the offstage elsewhere as she is performing this speech) in defense of her marriage and worth as a woman. Or we might think of it as her authenticating act as a hero. She has had to be everything in her marriage, nurturer (only at the end will Jason claim a role in this) and savior of the family (another role Jason arrogates after he has destroyed their home). She has played the parts of the kourotrophic goddess, getting the hero through his difficult adventures, and of the helpful princess,[24] neutralizing her own family who stood in the way of the hero's progress. Details of all these (such as her father's attitude toward visiting foreigners, the age of her brother, what exactly she did to Pelias), though they feature in other versions of the legend, are conveniently omitted, so we will not be distracted from the tragedy at hand nor draw premature parallelisms.

Now motherhood is an obstacle to be overcome. At the same time it is useful as one of the tools of her heroic revenge. The children are her weapons to kill the princess and her father, and to destroy Jason. A hero does not count the costs. Medea sacrifices the golden gifts of Helios: to withhold them would be like refusing to go into battle or like counting the spoils of war at a higher value than the battle itself. She sacrifices the golden-haired great-grandsons of Helios. The children are her past labors, but a hero must keep going forward, and not, like Jason, settle down into comfortable royal luxury. Even Heracles could not rely on his past glory, could not refuse a new adventure (*Alcestis* 487). And when he kills his children he speaks of it as his last labor (*Heracles* 1279–80) and still he goes on to the next stage of his life, opened to him because of a past adventure.

Here, too, is the mother speaking in memory of the agonizing pains of childbirth, now wasted. The toil of nurture is also in vain and has been or would have been all hers (despite Jason's later claim). What had Jason said to the children? "Grow up" (918). And he pictured them grown (reaching the "*telos* of young manhood," 920) as his allies, men useful to him (920–1). In response to this great scene the chorus will sing of the vanity of child-bearing, the toils and troubles and deaths

[24] See de Luce (1997: 25 ff.).

of children.[25] At the end Jason will regret ever bringing them into the world (1413–4).

Medea continues with a projection of what might have been:

> Truly once I (poor me) had hopes, high hopes
> in you, that you would care for my old age
> and when I died with your own hands you would lay me out decently,
> something human beings dearly vie for.
> Now it's all gone, that sweet expectation. (1032–6)

The sweet expectation is gone. She will do those intimate rituals for them which in the natural course of life children do for their dead parents. Again she projects their lost future, as adults, even further along, when once again she would be with them, this time in their care, when they would perform this final act for her.

Her life with them, their lives, are presented as a whole from birth to middle age. But these short years, now past, are all there is to be of their lives. Often in tragedy the beginning of a hero's life is recalled at its end or just before the crisis (as in the old nurse's remembrance of Orestes' infancy in *Libation Bearers*). Medea goes back to her children's birth and then projects a future that is an alternative ending to the one she has chosen. She will not be there for their weddings. They will not be with her in her old age or at her death. This is closure for them. For her it is closure to this episode in her life: the end and fulfilment of the legend of Jason and Medea.

Her expectations had been those of any mother in the "blossoming of the sweet flower of children in the home" which the chorus will sing of (1099), with their sentimental sensual words giving the lie to their seemingly hopeless song on whether the species should continue to procreate itself or end it all now. Is it better to have children in the home? Only if there is a home. Even then it is iffy at best.

The sweet thought of their lives together is dead (ὄλωλε, 1035) with them in the complete destruction of Jason's house and his hopes for the future, in his hopes for burial and a sleek old age, as well as continuance through them. This is Medea's answer to Jason's plans and prayers for the future of his children. Children are of little use to him: these children had been among his burdens (552). As adults they would be his allies against enemies. This is what children are for in a culture always

[25] On the deep pessimism of this ode see Golden (1971: 14).

at war.[26] Medea's projection at least puts them into a more humane setting as members of families.[27] Her own pain at their loss is exactly what makes it possible for her to kill them because she knows the pain it will cause Jason and the knowledge it will bring him to.

> for deprived of you two
> I will lead a bitter life that is painful to me.
> You dear eyes will never again see
> your mother, after going to another form of life. (1036–9)

The sweet expectation is changed to bitter, painful, salty sorrow. She will go on living without them. These words imply more than a change of address, but would not give away her plans. Her life will change its shape temporarily. The word order in 1036–7 shows the children left behind as she takes off. Her life (1037) is surrounded by bitterness and pain, but she will get through it. This is the end of the first part of the dialogue.

Then their eyes catch her:

> pheu, pheu, why do you look at me (your mother), children,
> with your eyes, why smile the last last smile?
> aiai what will I do? My heart is gone,
> women, when I see the bright eye of my children. (1040–3)

The children's eyes:[28] there have been looks before, but this is the first engagement of eyes in the play: the eyes of the children, innocent and honest and bright, the sign of their beauty. They laugh, as children do, in their uncertainty at their mother's bizarre behavior. Their laugh almost makes her risk her enemies' laughter. "My heart is gone, women": she loses for a moment that steely, heroic certainty and determination. She addresses this to the women of the chorus, themselves mothers, who are suffering with her over the children, seeing in them their own children and in her themselves. She interposes them into her loss of heart (1043), in this way feminizing herself and the children. She brings these women into the circle of mother and children. She is at this time a woman with the others. As a woman she cannot destroy her babies.

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[26] See also des Bouvrie (1990: 219–24).

[27] She speaks of their marriages, of their tending her in her old age, but not of their being parents, as Alcestis does of her daughter (*Alcestis* 318–9).

[28] Most (1999: 34–5) writes of children as a rhetorical means of arousing pity. On this scene of eye-contact, see 32.

> Farewell my plans of before.
> I will take my children from the land.
> Why should I, to torture their father with their ills,
> myself get ills in double number?
> No, I will not, farewell my plans. (1044–8)

Another chance for the children. Another *might have been*.[29] By making these children so physically appealing, so deeply loved by her, of course she makes the loss of them all the greater, the sacrifice more heroic, and the deed more tragic and horrible. This scene makes us feel the loss more and what it means to her. She will miss them, her creations, terribly. But the *story* will be her new creation, a work of a different truth or a work of a different fiction, since she is now offering an alternative to the known story.[30]

The children are always dead at the end of the story of the marriage of Jason and Medea. The cult of Hera Akraia verifies this.[31] If *she* does not kill them, there will have to be outsiders to come in and kill them, but that would take away her control of the action that will become her defining story. This, surely, is one meaning of the constant reference to other versions. The adding of necessity as a motive is not merely self-deception; the danger to the children is real.[32] There never has been any real hope for the children, only hope for Medea.

In the scene she thinks how it will be: them growing up, them gone. She has to choose one ending of the story and reject the others. However much of this speech we accept as genuine, the rapid changes in Medea show her torment, her double-mindedness, her choice to be one thing and not the other, without which she has no tragic substance, only ordinary mortal sanity. Here is seen the pathetic reality of that terrible choice—to be a hero or a woman.

> And yet what is wrong with me? Do I want to be an object of
> ridicule for letting my enemies go unpunished?

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[29] See Ohlander (1989: 129–74) for a fine analysis of suspense in the fifth episode.

[30] See McDermott (1987: 158–61) and (1991: 123–32). On Medea as the "author" of her own new myth, see Boedeker (1991: 95–112, esp. 109).

[31] Although, as Dunn argues (1994: 103–15), rituals do not relate to life in a completely straight-forward way. Medea, as he says, "uses language that belongs to another Medea" (112–3). On the death of the children as a *telos* see McDermott (1989: 20).

[32] As Ohlander believes (1989: 144). On the necessity to kill the children, see Gabriel (1992: 362–5); Corti (1998: 30, 32).

> These things must be undertaken. Damn my cowardice
> to let soft (feminizing) words into my mind! (1049–52)

She remembers (or/and reminds us of) Creon's fear of being softened (291, 316), which he will be, in a physical as well as psychological sense. Medea has a great interest in and understanding of the vulnerability of the flesh: from the dismemberment of her brother (not mentioned by Euripides in this play, but probably known to the audience), through the boiling of Pelias (again, a detail not given by Euripides, but well attested in vase-paintings), the burning robe for Glauke and her father, the touching of her children's soft skin (1075), to her refusal (devastating to him) to let Jason touch the children (1402–4, 1412). Creon and his daughter are not the enemies she has in mind at this point, since she knows that her plan is succeeding. "Enemies" here must mean Jason. And it is common enough to use the plural for the singular, but could it be more? His children whom he would make into his allies? Other oppressors of women?

> Go, children, go into the house. Whoever
> is not permitted to be present at my sacrifice,
> take care. I shall not let my hand grow slack. (1053–5)

It looks like the end for the children and not only their exit line but hers as well. Can Euripides delay the inevitable any longer? The house, animated from the beginning by her cries, is waiting for the children. The command not taken is doubtless a rarity.[33] But Nurse had given one very similar to this (89) and repeated it fifteen lines later (105). Perhaps infantile extras need additional cues or perhaps Euripides has been building to this scene.[34] Medea calls them back or they hesitate in confusion.

The audience would expect at line 1055 that Medea would go inside to perform her sacrifice in the recesses of her home where she worships

[33] See Reeve (1972: 54 n. 1); Bain (1977: 24–7); Mastronarde (1979: 109–10) argues for a break in contact as the children move toward the door and Medea turns away from the door (at 1053); Medea's cry after 1055, he posits, is strong enough to get the children's attention and stop them before they enter the stage-building.

[34] As Golden (1971: 12–3) writes, "Medea's children, sometimes subtly, sometimes violently and dramatically, make a continuous claim on our attention from the beginning to the end of the play."

Hecate.[35] Vase paintings[36] which represent Euripides' version of Medea show the children's bodies lying on an altar. Is this a compositional element only or a reference to this line of the tragedy? This is not to say that Medea transfers responsibility, by calling the murder of her children a "sacrifice" (see Page *ad loc.*).[37] She had just said "these things the gods and I . . . I have schemed them, not thinking straight" (1013–5).[38] Later she will blame Jason and continue to blame him until the end of the play (1074; 1364, 1366, 1372, 1402). Her other scheme, to murder the princess and anyone who touches her, will be interpreted both by an old woman slave and by Creon as a divine visitation (1171–3, 1208), because it seems to them more than human (and perhaps it is). The children will later be dedicated to Hera and their deaths mimicked in the rites by which other children are separated from their mothers to serve in the temple.

Medea both does and does not take responsibility. Others—those who have participated in this tragedy whether sympathetic to Medea or hostile and hurtful—must also share in the responsibility. Why else should other parents have to atone for Medea's "unholy murder"? Has it, then, become no longer a sacrifice? The women of the chorus participate up to a point in calling for revenge and even at the end they accept the justice of Jason's fate. We may also at the end think back on the chorus' astrophic song on the virtues of childlessness. "Be careful

[35] On Hecate as "mistress of dark nights, deserted streets and crossroads, and murder" see Mikalson (1989: 85).

[36] *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich/Munich (1992), vol. VI.2, pp. 198–9 (described in vol. VI.1, pp. 390–1): Medeia 30 and 36. Medeia 30 shows one child lying dead on the altar and the other running from his mother (cf. *Medea* 1271); 36 shows both children dead on the altar with Medea herself in a solar medallion in her dragon chariot; the Paidagogos stands over the children with his hands on his head, in mourning. Medeia 39 shows Medea in the chariot with a dead child in each arm. It is interesting that 30 and 36 suggest the impact of the scene not seen on the visual imagination. Medea's words (1054–5) call to mind the altar which is then placed into the rendering of the pitiful second strophe of the fifth stasimon (1273–81).

[37] See Henrichs (2000: 177, 186), who suggests that in Euripides the language of sacrifice shows that the action is problematized. This is certainly true of Medea's "sacrifice." Her sacrifice of the children is verbal rather than physical, but they do not go like unblemished animals to the altar; they run for their lives and scream bloody murder.

[38] She starts with the plural subject but ends with the participle and verb in the singular.

what you wish for" is a frequent theme in tragedy as well as folktale.[39] There is also the implication in tragedy that no one is immune from disaster or responsibility and this includes the spectators and readers, as well as characters and chorus. In fact the chorus' penultimate song generalizes what happens in the tragedy to make it universal. If Medea is a representative of all women, almost a scapegoat[40] then the play (*pace* Jason)[41] is saying that any woman could do this. "In requital for the impious murder," there will be a ritual in which separation of parents from their children is experienced, but is not permanent (1381–3). Not infrequently the community shares in a collective guilt (through the plague in *Oedipus*, and in Teiresias' prediction of citywide pollution in *Antigone*, for example) and often in a collective mourning (as in *Hippolytus*). And of course this is a reference to a real ritual which is performed in expiation for the deeds of the Corinthian women in *another version of the story*. As often there is something thought-provoking, if not disturbing, about Euripides' ritual closure. In any case Medea's call here for ceremonial exclusion sounds like an exit line, but she does not exit. Instead she stays behind to say farewell to her children in the play's most poignant lines.

> [Ah, ah!
> Do not, my heart, do not do this.
> Let them go, unhappy one, spare the children.
> There, with me living they will delight you.] (1056–8)

Kovacs believes that the scene is smoother without 1056–64 (or 1056–63), and he may well be right. Even so it is worthwhile to try to understand these lines, if only to see what appeal they could have had for a later producer.

Medea sees the children going into the house, knowing that it is for the last time, and is struck by pity, for them, for herself. In spite of the awkwardness and other difficulties, it is effective coming after the first confirmation of her resolve. Her cry (or possibly some other gesture)

[39] Very prominent in this one, where Nurse begins by wishing away the whole history of Jason and Medea and Jason all but ends the play by wishing he had never fathered children.

[40] On Medea as scapegoat, see Moreau (1996: 99–110) and Christa Wolf's *Medea*. Also Corti (1998: esp. 15); Zerba (2002: 331–2).

[41] "No Greek woman would have dared such a thing," 1339–40. Of course the chorus has just mentioned Ino (said there to have killed her two sons when the usual story is that she killed one and her husband the other).

stops the children from going inside. She addresses her passionate spirit, heroically, as if it were separate from herself, using both first and second person pronouns of herself and her parts (as Electra does in Euripides' *Electra* when she is unburdening herself of the water pot, 140–1). This pronominal confusion is another hint of the agitation of her mind in accepting and rejecting the action she is about to perform. The act is alien to her and she must make it her own.

Perhaps the word "delight" repels her (1058, εὐφρανοῦσι). She will not be swayed by thoughts of her own happiness, as earlier she took no delight in her children. There is more at stake. Here is a fine example of heroic generosity (gone wrong). And so once again she changes course.

> By the nether avengers in Hades,
> there is no way I will give up
> my children to my enemies to abuse.
> [They must in any case die, and since they must,
> I will kill them who gave them birth.] (1059–63; 1062–3 = 1241–2)

As has been often noted before, this passage is particularly difficult. Medea has just said that she will take the children to Athens with her, meaning that she would not leave them behind. She never did intend to leave them behind alive. But it also looks as if she never (for more than an instant) intended to take them with her either. But because of her other murderous scheme, which is coming to its end in the palace at this exact moment in the play's time, these children are the enemies of the royal house. If they were to live they would never be safe from the relatives of Creon or from Jason's demand to have them back. She must kill them to save them from the same (or worse) fate at others' hands. Or must she kill them to be in control? Or she must kill them to show how important they are to Jason and to herself? Or to make Jason understand that the life of inconsequentiality that he has chosen is not a life for a human being? All of these reasons and more. They are, after all, mortal like the rest of us. And why she must kill them is made plain in the next lines (envisioning the death of the princess): this is the connection in her mind, as if the two sets of murders are one action. The last two lines (1062–3) work better at 1240–1, and would not be as effective there if repeated so soon. It is interesting that her motives for killing them are close to the reasons that real-life filicides kill their children: the altruistic motivation (that the children are better off dead, or that the parent is saving them from a worse fate), revenge against

a spouse, and the unwanted child motive (the children have become burdens; Jason found them so and Medea has not considered them in her arrangements for her own future). Another is the accidental killing, rejected by Euripides, but one of the other versions of the legend (that Medea went too far in trying to make her children immortal).

> It is accomplished and there can be no escape.
> Upon her head is the garland and in the robes
> the royal bride is meeting her demise. I know it clearly. (1064–6)

The chorus had already visualized the bride's death and with it given up hope for the children, perhaps expecting them to be consumed in the general conflagration.[42] But they have come back. And this leads directly to the sad journey of Medea and that of the children:

> But I shall go a most wretched road
> and these I shall send on one more wretched still. (1067–8)

The princess is dying on the spot. The scene that will be described is one of hair-raising microkinetic action and then rest, each detail described with clinical care. Even time is told as motion in space. The journey of the children is figurative, from the interior of Medea's house to the shadows below. Her journey will be to Athens, alone, the most familiar of the journeys, turned into something outrageous, fantastic, and most otherly. Or is her road the symbolic one of killing those she loves from which there is no going back?

> I want to speak to my children. Give me,
> give your mother your right hand to kiss. (1069–70)

With these words she delays their exit (if she has not done so before). Here at least she is giving a clear request, countermanding the earlier one sending them into the house. They are all standing at that hateful door, the entrance to Hades or to the void, as she makes her farewell to her children, taking in turn (a reason for this second pathetic repetition, δοτ', 1069, 1070) their hands in hers. She would bend or squat or kneel in a posture imitating but not completing a supplication.

> Oh dearest hand, mouth most dear to me
> and noble form and face of my children,
> be happy, but there—all [you might have had] here

[42] See Ohlander (1989: 128–9) on the possibility still kept alive that the Corinthians may kill the children even after the fourth episode and fourth stasimon when their death is inevitable.

your father has taken away. O sweet embrace,
soft skin and freshest breath of children.
Go, go. I can no longer look at you.
I am overcome by the tragedy of it all. (1071–7)

This scene is among Euripides' finest.[43] I am grateful to David Kovacs (1986) for arguing so convincingly against its excision, not that many people would leave it unread despite the brackets in Diggle's text. The touching of the children has been so important and will return in the vituperative yet still pathetic finale. It would be a shame if Medea did not get to touch them tenderly until after they were dead.

And I realize what evils I shall undertake
but my (heroic) spirit [θυμός] is stronger than my plans
which is responsible for people's greatest calamities. (1078–80)

These lines have been commented on and quoted since antiquity.[44] What can be added? Perhaps it can be agreed that her *thumos* is indeed stronger than her plans. Her plans have changed many times in the play, from thoughts of suicide and of killing Jason and the royals through various phases that included setting the palace on fire, to the final plan that is almost rejected here for an instant and then confirmed once or twice. Murder is always the goal. Earlier plans must have included a happier life for herself and her family. One thing that has never deserted her is her *thumos* (unless temporarily when she was the perfect wife to Jason, but even then accommodating him in grand actions and adventures). The action she will do, that she must do, will bring her (as others, including the chorus, have seen) the greatest sorrow of her life.[45] At the last she says a regretful farewell in this touching scene to the little boys she knows she will kill.

This wonderful scene presents the divided Medea for one last time. She must remain divided because otherwise she could have no sympathy from chorus or audience. Her *thumos* triumphs and that is the end of suspense.[46] It also will be the end of motherhood. The chorus in one last expression of sympathy imagines life without children (1081–115).

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[43] Ohlander (1989: 131) charmingly writes of it, "If scenes were mountains this one would be Euripides' Everest."

[44] One of the best comments is Gill (1983: 136–49).

[45] As Kovacs points out (1986: 351), "in these lines Medea's desire for vengeance overcomes not her sense of right and wrong but her prudent desire to avoid pain." Cf. Burnett (1973: 1–24).

[46] See Foley (1989: 61–85).

Appendix
Whose Children?

The prominence of the children in the play, verbal reference to them, their actual stage time, all these have been noticed often before. Their short scene in the prologue with their care-givers highlights their innocence and vulnerability. There, for the only time in the drama, they are displayed as normal children, just returned from playing outdoors, perhaps with their hoops or balls, frisking about along the way and then stopping in front of the doors. Before long they are threatened from every direction. Their father has abandoned them. Their mother hates them. Creon exiles them with their mother. Their stepmother, Jason's new bride, finds them disgusting. Unnamed Corinthian kinsmen of Creon would probably have killed them if it were not too late. Their mother's Nurse fears for them. The chorus tries to protect them but sings of the virtues of childlessness and does not really focus on them as particular children,[47] but rather as generic young whom a mother must nurture and not harm. Without this particularity it is easier to sacrifice them to an abstract ideal. Aigeus, though mad for a child of his own, does not even mention them. Creon, is more devoted to his own child than to the country he rules, and for that very reason does not want these children around. Medea loves them and kills them. Three scenes give them individuality: the one discussed above in which Medea lingers over them making them more real, giving them dimensionality by dwelling on their physical features; the reported scene in the palace and chamber of Glauke in which the old servants, who accompanied Jason to his new bride's house, fondle the children, taking each in turn; and finally the off-stage murder scene that comes in the midst of the fifth stasimon where the children's individual desperate cries are heard and then are silent.[48]

The children are trapped inside the house. Their own sword-wielding mother has become a snare. They are trapped in the story, their parents' pawns in their deadly game of *pessoi*, moved back and forth from one player to the other, their value realized only through loss. The children are trapped, too, in the lines of the play, catalogued below.

[47] On typecasting of children, see Sifakis (1979: esp. 69–70).
[48] On the physicality of the production see Griffiths (2006: 112).

11 ξὺν ἀνδρὶ καὶ τέκνοισιν ("with husband and children"): Nurse talks of the family when it was still a family. Later Jason will refer to these children and Medea as his burdens or misfortunes. The immediate context is the Nurse's definition of σωτηρία ("security," 14) within the perfect marriage of like-minded man and woman, but the bigger context is also her regret. She brings up these things now because she feels the impending danger. Here she also avoids using any possessive. She does not say "her children" or "his children" or "their children," just "children."

17 προδοὺς γὰρ αὑτοῦ τέκνα δεσπότιν τ' ἐμὴν . . . ("after betraying *his own* children and *my* mistress . . ."): of course they are *his* children here, because otherwise the betrayal would be trivialized. Nurse wants to emphasize the anti-heroic betrayal of one's own (one's *philoi*), that is, the betrayal of oneself. Jason has already betrayed the continuation of his line and his survival after death.[49] By the end of line 17 Medea is no longer *his*. "My mistress": the family is broken into three elements: Jason, the betrayer; his children; my mistress. Medea may not be his wife any more, but the children are still his.

36 στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας ("she hates [the] children"). The context here is Medea's loss of her family relationships. Jason has betrayed (προδούς) her and the children (17, 33) and she has betrayed (προδοῦσ') her own family (31) and is without a country (34–5). What she has is her children, but she can find no pleasure in them. Nurse's words imply that at one time Medea, a mother like other mothers, enjoyed her children (36). Nurse then introduces the element of fear. Other passions exist within the general regret: love and hate, betrayal and anger. But all are leading to fear. The juxtaposition (of 36 and 37) may make the fear specific to the children. But Nurse goes on to voice a rather more global apprehension, which finally amounts to fear for her mistress' well-being (43).

46 ἀλλ' οἵδε παῖδες . . . ("Here come the children . . ." from their play): from mythology and operatic passions the focus shifts to domesticity. The children run onstage, in high spirits after their recreation. Nurse's words make us see the children, center our attention on them, and not look past them to the important and interesting

[49] See des Bouvrie (1990: 219).

activities of adults. She makes us see them *first*, not the group of a man with two children in tow, but two children with a man in tow. These are the children who have already been mentioned three times. Οἵδε παῖδες also means "these children": for the moment, the focus is on them as Nurse tells us these are the children I have been talking about. The children, then, surround the old slave's words about fear and the more frightening aspects of Medea's personality.

53 τέκνων . . . τῶν Ἰάσονος ("of Jason's children"): now they are *his* again, but are separated, alienated from their father, connected to him through the old servant.

70–1 ὡς τούσδε παῖδας . . . σὺν μητρί . . . ("these children . . . with [the/their] mother . . ."): the children are the object of Creon's command because they are here in front of us; but if that is the whole of it, it could have been expressed in another way. The children need not have been the only direct object of Creon's decree. In the picture the servant calls up, the old men in the town square see the children and make geezerish clucking sounds and go on to discuss the rumor. The old *paidagôgos*, because he is in charge of the children, naturally thinks of them first. But there is also the other factor: Creon is eager to get these children out of the way because they are the palpable proof that his new son-in-law was already married when he gave his daughter to him. "Creon, king of this country, is in the process of exiling *these children* from Corinthian territory along with their mother." This is the first we hear of the sentence of exile. We should not let the prominence of Medea's character and reaction to the sentence of exile overshadow the dual purpose of Creon's pronouncement.

74 Καὶ ταῦτα Ἰάσων παῖδας ἐξανέξεται . . . ("and will Jason allow his children [to suffer, 75] these things?"): Nurse brings Jason and his offspring back together. The children are his again, within his sphere. The placement of her words shows her moral repugnance at Jason's betrayal and his complicity in the suffering of his children:

> παῖδας ἐξανέξεται
>
> πάσχοντας (74–5)
>
> (will he put up with his children suffering):

Jason's indifference is then underscored by his old servant (77–8): his betrayal is absolute.

82 ὦ τέκνα (“ah, children”): the first of many addresses to the children. “Do you hear?” Nurse brings the children more into focus as sentient beings and not just stage props. She tries to make them aware of their father’s betrayal.

88 εἰ τούσδε γ’ εὐνῆς οὕνεκ’ οὐ στέργει πατήρ (“if the father does not love them because of his [new] marriage”): again (as in line 53) Jason is alienated from the children because of his new marriage couch. He does not care about these children any more. Both servants are agreed on this.

89, 98–105 ἴτ’—εὖ γὰρ ἔσται—δωμάτων ἔσω, τέκνα (“go—everything will be all right—inside the house, children”). In this further address to the children an order is given that is not immediately carried out.

> τόδ’ ἐκεῖνο, φίλοι παῖδες… (98)
>
> This is what I was talking about, dear children…

Nurse engages the children in the story she has been telling, acting, and re-enacting, warning them about their mother’s mood, telling them to avoid her, as if it were possible.

> ἴτε νῦν, χωρεῖθ’ ὡς τάχος εἴσω. (105)
>
> Go on, run along inside now.

The children are finally sent inside, but the technique of keeping them there at the house door has been affective and it sets up the later scene of Medea and her children. The point is to make them real, to make us aware that these children (unlike some other stage children, Alcestis’, for example, who are necessary for the ethos of the death scene, but do not return) are important to the plot. Children running on stage, being sent in with their minder could be just a typical pathetic element. But these children, held back at the door and worked into the mood and morals of the scene, are made central to everyone’s thoughts and feelings, the servants’, Medea’s, Creon’s, and the victims of Jason’s and Creon’s political ambitions.

112–4

> ὦ κατάρατοι
> παῖδες ὄλοισθε στυγερᾶς ματρὸς
> σὺν πατρί, καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι.

> Oh, cursed
> children of a hateful mother, damn you,
> with your father, and the whole house go to hell.

Despite the precautions of the aged *paidagôgos* as warned by Nurse, the children come into Medea's line of sight. She curses them but does not disclaim them. They are hers. She herself is hating and hated: whether the adjective (στυγερᾶς) is active or passive or both, their mother is not very good company. She curses them with their father and wishes them to be destroyed with their father, σὺν πατρί. They are to be exiled with their mother, σὺν μητρί. She ends with a curse on the house: it is noteworthy that even this early in the play she speaks of wiping out Jason's line. Still inside, she herself continues to be part of this house with them. But this house is already destroyed (139): Medea needs a broader scope, which she will attain when she makes her first entrance into the wider world. The children are trapped with their parents and because of their parents.

116–7 τί δέ σοι παῖδες πατρὸς ἀμπλακίας
μετέχουσι; τί τούσδ' ἔχθεις;

> Why do the children share in
> their father's sin? Why do you hate *them*?

Nurse asks this reasonable question, but her word order gives the answer: παῖδες πατρός. They are their father's children and caught between their two parents, <u>σοι</u> παῖδες <u>πατρός</u>. Nurse addresses the absent children. By now her fear has become grief. Putting together all she has heard and said in the prologue, Nurse turns from her apprehension for the children to more general and political musings in an interesting analogy between personal temperament and the *polis*.

In the rest of the prologue there is little more about the children. Except for their pleas to Medea not to kill the children and their one generalizing song about the sorrows associated with child-rearing, the chorus has little to say about these particular children. In her first speech to the chorus Medea says nothing about children other than her famous words about birth and battle. It is Creon who brings children back to the center, both her sons, whom he is eager to have out of the way (273), and his own daughter whom he loves almost to excess (329), putting her before the city-state he rules. Medea speaks of rearing and

educating children (295) but her words are certainly too general to be about her own children, who in any case are too young to incur the political envy of the citizens for their cleverness or skill.

The Creon-scene begins and ends with the sentence of exile.

273 λαβοῦσαν δισσὰ σὺν σαυτῇ τέκνα ("taking with you your two children"): Creon's word order suggests that she is to go hence "with a child... on each arm" (as Countee Cullen translates Medea's words at 513). The children surround her. Or in another phrasing of the same words the two of them are trapped by her λαβοῦσαν δισσὰ σὺν σαυτῇ but then separated from each other by her, δισσὰ σὺν σαυτῇ > τέκνα, as they will be in the final interior action when she traps them and kills them one by one.

352–3 εἴ σ' ἡ 'πιοῦσα λαμπὰς ὄψεται θεοῦ
καὶ παῖδας ἐντὸς τῆσδε τερμόνων χθονός...

If the coming light of the god will see you
and your children inside the borders of this country...

Creon reiterates his sentence of exile and adds to it death (θανῇ, "you will die," 354) if she disobeys. The verb is singular. But what would be the fate of these unwanted motherless children? "Tomorrow's light of the sun" separates the mother and her children. With the help of this god (Helios) Medea will kill her children and fly away (like the Mormo).[50] The land rejects Medea and her children (though another will welcome her and itself carry her to safety, 848). This threat and the short time allowed her add to the element of necessity that Medea feels increasingly as the deadline approaches.

342–3 παισίν τ' ἀφορμὴν τοῖς ἐμοῖς, ἐπεὶ πατὴρ
οὐδὲν προτιμᾷ μηχανήσεσθαι τέκνοις.

And a start in life for my children, since [their] father
sets no value on providing for [his] children.

"For the children that are mine" she calls them. Their father is estranged, though surrounded by words for children at the beginning and end, the second (τέκνοις) etmologically stressing

[50] Johnston in Clauss and Johnston (1997: 62–7).

> the parental relationship. Medea goes on to show by her placement of words and their sound that Creon by contrast cares for his child: παίδων πατὴρ πέφυκας ("you are a [real] father of children," 344, she even adds to the number of his children, though we know of only one child fathered by Creon). The use of πέφυκας shows him to be a *natural* father, while the alliteration and juxtaposition of the words strongly opposes his love for his child to Jason's abandonment of his children. And continuing with the heavily alliterated κείνους κλαίω συμφορᾷ κεχρημένους (347, "I weep for them suffering misfortune"), she is caught with them in hardship.

In the rest of the episode there is no more about the children. Medea needs a place of asylum for *herself*, made more personal and physical by the use of τοὐμὸν δέμας (388). Nor does the famous choral reflection, "Back flow the rivers" reflect the discussion of children in the surrounding episodes. Children come back in the cynical second episode, but there they are little more than commodities. Jason offers money for them (461) as if he cared about their privations and perhaps he does, but he has sacrificed them to the greater good of his own welfare.

490 παίδων γεγώτων· εἰ γὰρ ἦσθ᾽ ἄπαις ἔτι ("when we already have children: for if you were still childless…"): Medea is looking at the children as possessions, important to a man and worth leaving his wife for. She here anticipates the Aigeus scene with its emphasis on childlessness by imagining Jason childless, so that she hardly needs Aigeus to make her aware of a man's need for descendants.

513 σὺν τέκνοις μόνη μόνοις ("alone with orphaned [lonely or only] children"): Medea's words prefigure the last scene. She will leave alone, holding the bodies of the only children Jason will ever have. They have gone the lonely road, forever bereft of their mother. But here mother and children are still a unit as she pictures the lonely life of exile with them as her only and constant companions and cares. At 515 she and the children are once more together as objects of Jason's betrayal: παῖδας ἥ τ᾽ ("the children and she who…"). The grammatical dissimilation (the children in the accusative as subject of the infinitive, Medea in the nominative as subject of the finite verb, but also subject of the infinitive) may also point ahead to the different fates of mother and children. She will save them at least from a life of poverty and privation on the road.

549–50 εἶτα σοὶ μέγας φίλος
καὶ παισὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖσιν…

nd besides a great friend to you
and *my* children…

Jason without thinking about it in this sentence interposes himself and his ambition (in the form of his marriage which he characterizes as a great friend) between Medea and her children, whom he gallingly[51] calls "my children." It is hard to say whether she interrupts him (evidenced by his saying "shut up," 550) because he says "great friend" or "my children." Either would do it. To Gill these lines are crucial.[52] The "great friend" has broken up what is left of the family of Jason.

552 πολλὰς ἐφέλκων συμφορὰς ἀμηχάνους ("dragging along many impediments without resources"): To Jason, his wife and children are merely impediments, more mouths to feed as it were, and useless (ἀμηχάνους) to his advancement. He shows clearly that he does not think of himself as having come to Corinth as a member of a family, even as head of a family, but as himself and for himself. He sees himself (expressed in the participle ἐφέλκων) caught among his misfortunes. He disentangles himself quite easily in the next lines (553–4) by repudiating his family, almost as if they did not exist, something many men may wish for at times, but few can achieve as immediately as Jason does. Nurse had said at the beginning: would that none of this had happened. Jason acts as if it had not happened. He sets himself free to return to his pre-Argo, pre-Medea state. By line 562 he has imagined a new family of royal sons, half-brothers to Medea's children (τοῖσιν ἐκ σέθεν τέκνοις, 563) as if it were that easy. On one side of this scene Medea has given eloquent voice for all time to the danger of childbirth. In the next episode Aigeus will make plain that the begetting of a royal heir is not to be taken for granted.

[51] See Barlow (1995: 41).
[52] Gill (1996: esp. 155–66).

565 σοί τε γὰρ παίδων τί δεῖ; ("What need have you for children?"): Women's purpose is to bear children for men. Jason's callousness reaches its nadir with these words. He has abandoned his children, but now in his projection of future sons of royal status he imagines taking back these sons, leaving Medea with nothing. Of course as the divorced wife she has no need of more children since they would not benefit her. Obviously she can project as well as he. But for the nonce she is more interested in proving him false. After Aigeus leaves she puts together in words of exquisite logic all that she has learned from the three men. That Creon can be reached through his daughter (a doublet for the murder of Pelias), that Aigeus will give her a home if she will help him become a father (a doublet for her life with Jason), that Jason not only thinks that women are worthless but will take her children once his position in the royal family is secure.

620 ὡς πανθ' ὑπουργεῖν σοί τε καὶ τέκνοις θέλω. ("That I want to help you and the children in every way."): Jason calls the gods to witness as he reiterates his desire to help out Medea and the children in their exile. The children are surrounded by their parents (by the *you* [σοί] and the *I* [of θέλω]. But the coziness of the arrangement of words is deceptive. The children are also trapped by these two abusive and negligent parents.

The choral reflection after the second episode is about love, friendship, and exile. Children are not mentioned. In the central third episode the children discussed are Aigeus' potential offspring. Words and phrases from the previous scene are repeated. Aigeus and Medea talk frankly about his childlessness: 669–70 παίδων—ἄπαις (cf. 671, 674). At 717 Medea reverses the order in her offer of hope to Aigeus (ἄπαιδα—παίδων) which he accepts (παίδων, 721). In this scene Medea does not mention her children. It is true that at one point she uses the plural (695, ἄτιμοι δ' ἐσμὲν οἱ πρὸ τοῦ φίλοι, "We are dishonored who were loved ones before."), but plural and singular are almost interchangeable in tragedy for the first person.

> I am driven from the land. (704)
> Creon drives me out of Corinth an exile. (706)
> Do not look on me abandoned, exiled, but receive me…(711 ff.)

In Medea's candid speech to the chorus we see why she has not asked for asylum for her children, because she has other plans for the children

which she announces at that point. Equally telling are the possessives she uses:

780 παῖδας δὲ μεῖναι τοὺς ἐμοὺς αἰτήσομαι ("I shall request that my children remain").

782 παῖδας τοὺς ἐμοὺς καθυβρίσαι ("my children . . . to insult"). In both lines "mine" is emphatic: the children (who are) mine.

792–3 τέκνα γὰρ κατακτενῶ
τἄμ'

I shall kill the children
that are mine.

Her word order once again prefigures the murder scene, where she will come between the children and kill them one by one.

At 794–6 and again at 803–5 the children are once more caught between their two parents and in the general violence of the destruction of Jason's whole house and in Medea's vision of herself as a hero (794–7). In the second passage the children are trapped between their parents, but also in παῖδας ὄψεται . . . ζῶντας the children encircle their father who will never see them alive again as if he is looking in differernt directions for them (as he does in the exodos), a nice irony since when he really was in the midst of his family he failed to see what they meant to him nor what he was doing to them. At the end he will look in vain for them. It was he, of course, who referred to these children as "the living children" (567, τὰ ζῶντ') as opposed to potential ones (566, τοῖς μέλλουσιν τέκνοις).

Finally, in the third stasimon the chorus is concerned with children.

825 θεῶν παῖδες μακάρων ("children of the blessed gods"): the chorus is referring to the Athenians, but Medea and her children are also divine progeny (cf. 1255–7).

851–65 With the words τεκέων (851) and τέκνα (855), τέκνων (857) and τέκνοις (861), the chorus emphasizes childbearing in their horror at the proposed child-murder (849). They supplicate Medea by her knees (853–4) and in the antistrophe picture the children doing the same (probably accompanied by gesture and dance movements).

In the fourth episode the children, not seen since the parodos, are brought out again. Medea uses them as instruments of her persuasions.

877–8 κασιγνήτους τέκνοις
ἐμοῖς φυτεύων…

fathering brothers
to my children…

Medea creates a cozy picture of her children in the heart of the new family, surrounded by their half-brothers and their common father, as if the brothers really were there to benefit her children. Like Jason she calls them "my children" (550, 878).

880 οὐκ εἰσὶ μέν μοι παῖδες; ("Do I not have children?"): Change the punctuation and this remark is more sinister ("I have no children.").

At 894 Medea calls out the children with the pathetic repetition, ὦ τέκνα τέκνα ("oh, children, children"). This is the first time we see her with the children. After the bitter divorce of episode 2, the family is reunited on stage, but only for Medea's show. She is using them and yet her tears are (or may be) real (925). "I gave them birth" (930): she is torn between her cruel plot and her natural feelings of nurture. She weeps out of pity for their lost growth (930–1).

949–50 λεπτόν τε πέπλον καὶ πλόκον χρυσήλατον
παῖδας φέροντας…

[I will send her gifts…] a fine dress and gold-wrought head-band,
my children carrying them…

Medea entangles the children, a carefully planned afterthought to the gifts she will send the new bride, in the subtle web and gold-braided crown. The children disappear among the gifts which have become more important. To a woman who is about to kill her children, while pretending to save them from poverty and homelessness, Jason's thinking about money at a time like this must seem particularly crass. When the chorus sings of their loss of hope (976–7) they too turn immediately to the gifts (978–81). The children and the gifts have become a unit. Medea gives them both to the princess; that is, she sacrifices both.

996–9 ὦ τάλαινα παίδων
μᾶτερ, ἃ φονεύσεις
τέκνα…

Oh unhappy mother
of children, who will kill
your young…

The children are once more in their mother's embrace and she in theirs, but she is the mother who will kill her offspring: these are the words that will define her forever.

Medea's farewell to her children which is also her final resolve to do the deed has already been treated in the previous section. After it the messenger arrives and the focus on the children continues.

1136–7 ἐπεὶ τέκνων <u>σῶν</u> ἦλθε δίπτυχος γονὴ
συν̀ πατρί…
When the pair of *your* children arrived
with their father…

From the beginning of the speech they are hers. The scene described is like a reprise of the opening. The two children with a grown man enter the house and proceed deep into it to the women's quarters, into the presence of a woman who hates them. But the servants love them and fondle them as their mother had done on stage in the previous scene. One kisses the hand, another the fair head of the children. After the embassy father and children once more form a group and depart. A servant stays behind to tell the tale. Here attention shifts to the other child, Creon's daughter as she becomes one with the gifts: 1188–9, πέπλοι δὲ λεπτοί…λεπτὴν ἔδαπτον σάρκα ("The fine fabric was eating her fine flesh," reading λεπτὴν rather than λευκὴν). The poisons are destroying her from inside her fine (or white) skin.

In the next episode Medea enters the house to trap and kill her children. There will be no escaping her embrace:

1236–7 μοι παῖδας κτανούσῃ ("by me after killing my children").

The chorus sings of the deed and the children even participate in the song. We hear forms of τέκνα and τίκτω (1254, 1261, 1262; 1273, 1276, 1280, 1281; 1283, 1286) over and over (and παίδοιν, 1289) and behind the scenes the cries of the children become lines of the song.[53]

[53] See Segal's sensitive piece on this ode (1997).

> Ah me! What will I do. Where can I run from mother's hands?[54]
> I do not know brother dear. We are done for. (1271–2)

The chorus wonders whether to intervene and decides to help the children, too late (1275–6).

> Yes, in the name of the gods, help. We need you.
> How close we are to being trapped under the sword. (1277–8)

The children, trapped for so long within the words of the play, are now free, saved from a more hostile hand. In the aftermath their parents continue to fight over ownership of them:

1301, 1303 Jason calls them "my children" and claims to care for them.

1309 παῖδες τεθνᾶσι χειρὶ μητρῴᾳ σέθεν ("Your children are dead by their mother's hand"): The chorus conveys the sad news. But they put the word for "your" at the end of the line dangerously close to their mother's hand. They are no longer his, forever separated from their father, though the chorus does not yet know how far. For at line 1313 they suggest he open the doors where he would be in the midst of the murder scene: πύλας ἀνοίξας σῶν τέκνων ὄψῃ φόνον ("open the gates and you will see the murder of your children").

In the exodos the children go back and forth between their parents in this grotesque parody of care and nurture of children. First "my children" when Jason believes they are still alive (1303), they become "your children" (1325) when he realizes she has killed them and left him childless (1326), again piling up *tek-* words to emphasize the unnaturalness of her crime. They are his again by 1337: τεκοῦσά μοι τέκνα ("after bearing me children"). And he even claims to have reared them (1349). Finally the two parents vie over love for the children and responsibility for their deaths.

Jason:	ὦ τέκνα (1363; "Oh, children").
Medea:	ὦ παῖδες (1364; "Oh, children").
Jason:	ὦ τέκνα φίλτατα (1397; "Oh, dearest children").
Medea:	μητρί γε, σοὶ δ' οὔ. (1397; "to their mother, not to you").

[54] In a recent child murder in Texas, while the mother was drowning the fourth of her children, her oldest son came upon the scene. He tried to run, "only to be dragged back to the bathroom to meet the same fate as his four siblings," S. K. Bardwell, Mike Glenn, Ruth Rendon, *Houston Chronicle*, June 22, 2001.

Endings are in part for achieving a closure by going back over what has happened and why. In answer to Jason's pitiful pleading to touch the children Medea reminds him of what he has done:

1401–2 νῦν σφε προσαυδᾷς, νῦν ἀσπάζῃ,
τότ' ἀπωσάμενος.

> Now you speak to them, now you love them,
> but then you repudiated them.

> We have seen the results of Jason's rejection of his family. All he can do is wish he had never fathered them, picking up Nurse's initial regret, Medea's regret that she had followed him, and the chorus' conclusion that it is better not to have children. Nobody means it. Even Jason's love for his children is real by the end.

And the chorus concludes by putting these events into a wider perspective, which can only be done with a cliché. "It was just one of those things," we might say. "That's the way it is." Or call it "an act of God." The chorus reminds us one last time that the gods had a hand in the fulfilment of the plot. The acts of violence have not been random, but carefully reasoned, planned, and executed.

The children were doomed from the beginning: exiled from the country before they even return home from play, deserted by their father, loathed by both mother and stepmother. They are abandoned to their mother by their father, trapped in the house with their mother, a well-established murderer, ensnared in her murder plot, and caught in the very words of the play.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEDEA IN CORINTH[1]

Logic and dialectic are police arts.
Page duBois, *Torture and Truth*

Politics in ancient Athens belonged to men. And yet the *Medea*, though it is a play about a woman among women and a woman's power, is recognized as one of Euripides' most political plays. William Arrowsmith, for example, called it "a comprehensive critique of the quality and state of contemporary culture." More recently, Rainer Friedrich (1993) refers to the play as "Euripides' dramatization of the crisis of the *polis*." In Creon's Corinth there is no public debate, no chorus of elders, no chance for the use of reason. Creon himself is king, herald, and judge. In this vacuum of civic life the chorus of Corinthian women becomes the voice of the citizen body raised in protest against injustice and the domination of bad men. This chapter will look at the relation of the citizens to the city, at the vocabulary of power, the radicalization of the chorus of Corinthian women, and the empowerment of the powerless.

"Pleasing the citizens to whose land she has come," with these words (11–2)[2] Medea's elderly Nurse describes her mistress' sojourn in Corinth. In her own early speeches to the chorus and to Creon, Medea herself shows a political awareness absent from the male characters in the play who act according to personal motives and show little or no concern for the life of the community. Only Medea and the chorus show any real social conscience or consciousness.

Where are the citizens? This is one of the questions P. E. Easterling[3] suggests asking of a text to discover what image of the community a play offers. Another is what civic institutions are implicit or explicit. Consideration of these along with a concern for the relationships

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[1] On *Medea* as a political play Arrowsmith (1963: 47); Friedrich (1993); also Allan (2002: 17). Parts of this chapter appeared as Luschnig (2001: 8–28).

[2] On these words as enhancing Medea's status and attesting to her assimilation, see Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*).

[3] In Pelling (1997: 28–9).

between men and women, in this play in particular, is revealing of the inner and outer politics of the *Medea*.

The short answers are: 1. a) the male citizens are playing *pessoi* and b) the civic-minded citizens are present in the chorus of women, mistresses of the Corinthian *oikoi*. 2. The only political institution is Creon. More can be said about this, of course, by looking both at what is there and what is markedly absent. 3. Women in the *Medea* are more thoughtful, active, and intelligent than men, even though men seem to have all the power.

Citizens first come into the story in Nurse's speech. It is as if she moves from the heroic age with her story of the *aristoi* ("heroes" of line 5) and their quest for gain and glory, to something closer to the modern world of town life when she mentions Medea's relationship with the citizens (11–2). We do not find Jason, on the other hand, being concerned with a favorable reaction from the citizens to whose land he has come. Not a word is said about his politics except for his royal leanings and longings. A scholiast, explaining the nurse's remark (at line 11) tells us that Medea cured a famine in Corinth.[4] Perhaps it does not matter exactly what it was, certainly something beneficial, when Medea's special gifts were (still or again) used for the common good. The important point is that the women of Corinth are on terms of *philia* with her (11–2, 138, 179) and that her attitude is more egalitarian or at least less selfish than Jason's, as are, apparently, those of the women in the play generally, whether slave or free. If we use as evidence what happens in the play, we might surmise that the friendship of the chorus for Medea is in part an intellectual one. The chorus comes to comfort Medea but ends up being schooled by her. We see not just a chorus of Corinthian women, but a chorus of highbrow Corinthian women, given to general reflection, like other choruses, but also to commenting on the fact that they are engaging in subtle thinking and growing more self-assured in their assessment of their literary capacities. Intellectual and political content is present in all their songs. Is it because in a tyranny, where no one has any power except the monarch, women are on a more equal footing with men than in a male-dominated democracy or oligarchy where the power is shared among some or all of the free citizen men?

[4] Schwartz (1891: *ad* 11; vol. 2: 143). In the same note the Corinthians are said to also be interested in φάρμακα.

Citizens enter our consciousness again with the return of the children and their *paidagôgos* ("minder or caretaker"). News comes, with the males, from the masculine world outside. The old slave has been in contact with the citizens. And what is the role of the citizens? To sit at the *Pessoi* (a board game, probably a place in the public square where the game was played), gossiping about what their ruler is doing. Granted these are the oldest of the townsmen, but in many other plays old men act as a chorus of elders, advisers to the king.[5] In contrast to other plays about monarchs in which citizens participate at least in discussion even when the ruler is a tyrant in the modern sense (as in *Antigone*), *Medea* shows no participation by the citizens in the government, no mention of them except in the report of the *paidagôgos*. For example, in Sophocles' play (which is earlier, but nearly contemporary with *Medea*), Haemon tells his father that the people are siding with Antigone (*Antigone* 693–700). The chorus of elders in the same drama, though they demur from actual service and merely accede to Creon's commands, when at last they are consulted by him in desperation, give sound advice (1098, 1100–1, 1007). Here citizens at the gaming tables are quoted, but they are not even granted an opinion about whether it is right or wrong to exile these children and their mother. In *Agamemnon* the chorus of elders frequently comments on the political action, referring to the voice of the people, voicing criticism of Agamemnon, making cryptic comments about Clytemnestra, and openly opposing Aegisthus. In *Medea* citizens are not called in to deliberate on the sentence (as in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*) nor to judge the case (as in *Eumenides*). Under this tyranny all the citizens have to occupy themselves with is games and gossip. They are interested in matters related to the royal family, but unlike democratic citizens or those in the democratized monarchies of many plays they have no part in them.[6] When the old slave passes on his devastating tidbit of news, his word order may reflect the awe in which Creon is held, the monarch's name saved to the end of the sentence and the harsh, guttural κοίρανος χθονὸς Κρέων ("Creon the country's king," 71–2) indicating the suffocating grip he has on the land. Politics in Corinth is reduced to gossip. The ineffectualness of the tellers even casts doubt on the veracity of their tale (72–3). They must have heard

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[5] Even in *Herakles* the chorus of old men, though feeble and feckless, participates in hating the tyrant and protesting his decisions and actions.

[6] Podlecki (1986: 77–8).

it second or third hand themselves. Why do they even bring up the story now? Because, I think, they happen to catch sight of the victims of the decree and inadvertently spread the word. The fact of secrecy in itself adds to the atmosphere of oppression: truth, even that dictated from above, is not to be spoken aloud.

Before looking more closely at Creon in his one scene, let us consider briefly how he is referred to by the characters and chorus.[7] The first four times he is named in the tragedy it is as ruler. Four different words are applied to his power: αἰσυμνᾳ (19, "controls"), κοίρανος (71, "ruler"), ἄνακτα (269, "king"), and ἄρχει (702, "rules"). In his scene he calls himself βραβεύς (274, "arbiter, umpire, judge"). Τύραννος ("king, tyrant") is used over and over again, but mostly without his name.[8]

The first mention of him is by Medea's Nurse, Κρέοντος…ὃς αἰσυμνᾷ χθονός ("of Creon who controls the country," 19), αἰσυμνᾷ is a seldom-used verb which occurs nowhere else in Euripides. The office of the αἰσυμνήτης is defined by Aristotle (*Politics* 3.14.1285b) as αἱρετὴ τυραννίς ("elected tyranny") and interestingly Aristotle found a resemblance between αἰσυμνῆται and barbarian kings (1285a30–2 and 1295a11–4) from whom they differ in not having hereditary power. According to Newman in his commentary on the *Politics, ad* 1285a30, "The Aesymnete had larger powers than any Greek King of heroic times, for the administration of the State lay wholly in his hands." The tragic kings he most resembles, then, are Xerxes (in *Persai*), in being unaccountable to the people[9] and Lycus (in *Heracles*) in persecuting the wife and children, not even of his enemy as in *Heracles*, but of his φίλος. If Creon's rule was seen to be more like that of a foreign potentate than a heroic age king, the Greek/barbarian distinction is further blurred, as it is in the general Greekness of Medea herself, especially in her use of the Hellenic male prerogative of reasoned discourse.[10]

Τύραννος and its derivatives, as Fartzoff points out, are used twenty-two times in *Medea*. Surprisingly only one of these many uses refers unambiguously to Creon alone, and this is when he is denying that he has a tyrannical temperament (348). The others refer specifically to his

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[7] See Fartzoff's illuminating piece for the vocabulary surrounding Creon (1996: *passim*, esp. 153–5).

[8] Where his name is used in proximity to the title it is (307–8) in direct address when Medea denies her ability to hurt the "tyrants" and (1125–6) in the catalogue of the dead, "the τύραννος girl is dead and Creon *her father*." See below, note 11.

[9] Cf. Podlecki (1986: 79–80).

[10] See McClure (1999: 393 and *passim*).

daughter, to the royal house or family, to Jason's future offspring, to the marriage, and to the royal pair, Creon and his daughter.[11]

Κοίρανος is used four times, only once of Creon alone as his epithet (71) and three times of the king and his daughter (875, 936, 1299). Βασιλεύς likewise is used twice of Creon alone (554, 783), but only in the phrase "daughter of the king." Otherwise the word or its derivatives refers to the marriage (18, 547, 594), the house (960), the royal pair (455) or to Glauke alone (1003, 444?). Βασίλεια (444) is feminine but ambiguous; at some level it certainly refers to the princess, though it might be more general. By the time Medea finalizes her plans the enemy has become Creon's daughter and at the end of the king's life, it is his role as father that defines him (ὁ φύσας, 1126). This change of focus toward the bride herself may happen because it is through Glauke and not her father that Jason's ambitions are being realized. To Medea, Glauke is the τύραννος (887, 957, 1066, 1356; cf. 967) and this mental and verbal animosity from the protagonist creates—through the playwright's sleight of hand—a prominence for her even though she does not make an appearance.[12] What power does she have in her own right? The power to give Jason royal children, which Medea, though also a king's daughter, does not have. Creon may hold the political reins, but he is reached through his daughter, in Medea's persuasion of him, by Jason in his marriage, by Medea and the children in their embassy, and by his daughter quite literally in the death scene.[13] If

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[11] 42 τύραννον [τυράννους]: if singular the reference is ambiguous, either to the daughter or to Creon [if plural then it must refer to Creon and his daughter]; 119 τυράννων λήματα: the reference is generic, to the tyrannical disposition in Nurse's general reflection; 140 λέκτρα τυράννων: "the marriage with the royals"; 308 ἐς τυράννους ἄνδρας: against the royals; 348 ἥκιστα τοὐμὸν λῆμ' ἔφυ τυραννικόν: "my nature is not tyrannical, not in the least"; 453 ἐς τυράννους and 458 κακῶς τυράννους; 607 ἀρὰς τυράννοις: Jason is referring to Medea's curses against the royals; 597 τυράννους παῖδας: "the royal children" who are to be the brothers of Medea's children; 700 ἀνδρῶν τυράννων κῆδος: Medea informs Aigeus of Jason's love affair with royalty; 740 δόμος τυραννικός: "the royal house"; 778 γάμους τυράννων: "the royal marriage"; 887 γήμας τύραννον: "after marrying the royal [woman]"; 934 ἐπεὶ τυράννοις γῆς μ' ἀποστεῖλαι δοκεῖ: "since it is the decision of the royals to exile me"; 957 τῇ τυράννῳ μακαρίᾳ νύμφῃ δότε: "and give [them] to the blessed royal bride"; 967 νέα τυραννεῖ: "young, she is in power"; 991 κηδεμὼν τυράννων: "in-law of the royals"; 1066 νύμφη τύραννος: "the royal bride"; 1125 ὄλωλεν ἡ τύραννος ἀρτίως κόρη: "the royal girl has just died"; 1130 τυράννων ἑστίαν: "the royals' hearth"; 1298 τυράννων δώμασιν: "to the royal house/family"; 1356 ἡ τύραννος: "the royal [woman]". See Fartzoff (1996).

[12] On her prominence through the messenger's speech see de Jong (1990: 4–9).

[13] As Segal (1996: 34) writes of Glauke, instead of leaving her father's house, "this bride remains attached to her father with a ghastly literalness."

Creon's death is just a "lucky hit" for Medea, it is "likely" because 1. he loved his daughter and 2. Jason did not. Creon is devastated by her death. Jason is not. The only thing that gets to him is the loss of both his potential and living children.

As Creon approaches he is announced as ἄναξ (269), a designation of Homeric warrior kings. This accumulation of terms means to show the absolute power of Creon in civil and military matters. There is no question but that this is peacetime; still Aigeus' calling Pittheus his military ally is a reminder of the nature of the society on the brink of war in 431 B.C.E. when the *Medea* was produced. In the Aigeus scene, Medea voices fear that Creon or his survivors would "send heralds" (738) to demand her back, implying that to fail to deliver her into their hands could be interpreted as an act of war.[14]

Finally Creon is defined quite simply by Medea in the third episode (the Aigeus scene) as ὃς ἄρχει τῆσδε γῆς Κορινθίας ("who rules this land of Corinth," 702), perhaps because she wants to use the most neutral word in speaking to her potential new ally. After the middle of the play the influence of Creon has waned. From Medea's standpoint he is no longer a focal character in her drama, the new version of the legend she is creating. She has a place to go. He is now just the father (942, 1126, 1204, 1220) of the royal bride. Of course she is not sorry to take vengeance on him because he meant to do her harm. The enemies now are the daughter and Jason because they have denied her status and negated her value as a woman.

Creon's entrance, like those of the first four men who come on, is abrupt. He is announced by the chorus as a "messenger" (270) as if he is his own herald. He comes, like a traditional tyrant, accompanied by a bodyguard with whose help he threatens to strong-arm Medea unless she lets go of his hand (335).

After pronouncing the formal sentence of exile, he appends ἐγὼ βραβεὺς λόγου τοῦδε εἰμί ("I am the arbiter of this sentence," 274). The βραβεύς is the umpire or judge who makes a final decision and witnesses its carrying out,[15] which Creon declares he will do (275). Creon

[14] See, for example, Thucydides 1.29. It is interesting that Aigeus begins to show sympathy for Medea immediately after finding out that it was Creon who gave his daughter to Jason (703). There is clearly no love lost between these two kings. No state visit is planned. Aigeus has some apprehension about Creon's reaction if he should offer Medea safe conduct as well as asylum and is glad for the pretext of the oath.

[15] "The one who sees his order executed" (Verrall, 1881: *ad loc.*).

is playing too many roles: he is herald, king, judge: he has made the decision, he announces it and comes to see that it is carried out. There is to be no discussion or appeal. This must have seemed arbitrary to an audience who believed that words preceded action.[16] Creon has arrogated to himself the deliberative function of the *polis*. No one else is allowed to use words.[17]

Creon and Words

His first verb, ἀνεῖπον ("I have proclaimed, I proclaim," 272) is used of a formal proclamation, usually by a herald (*LSJ*). He goes on to say (274), "I am the arbiter of discourse." With these words he cuts off debate, forcing Medea, if she is going to get anywhere, to use another form of expression: complaint and question, even acknowledging that she has no right so much as to ask the reason for her exile (280). "There is no need" he says, "to cloak my words" (282), because all words are his, he can tell the truth without shame. He has already rejected her words and does so again, μὴ λόγους λέγε ("speak no words," 321). This is why her *argument* fails and she must resort to action, to suppliant status, which she does somewhere between 325 and 339. Λόγους ἀναλοῖς ("you are wasting words," 325), says Creon either because of his fixation with words or because she has only *said* "by your knees" but not actually gotten down on hers to take his,[18] but she goes on "have you no respect for my prayers?" (326: λιτάς are admittedly still words, though words requiring a special response) and σ' ἄντομαι ("I beseech you," 336). He continues to refuse her pleas and even threatens her with force. In any case before line 339 she has taken hold of him in the formal act of supplication. At 338 she accedes: "I/we will go into exile; that is not what I supplicated you for." I believe that she performs the full act of supplication at 324, earlier than Gould suggests[19] and that it is

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[16] See Halliwell's fine essay (in Pelling, 1997: esp. 120–3) and his references to Thucydides and Demosthenes. Also Ober and Strauss in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990: 237–40).

[17] Boedeker (1991: 101) notes that Medea is unresponsive to others' words, but she is not the only one. On modes of discourse in the play see also Williamson (1990: esp. 17, 21, 23).

[18] See Gould (1973: 85–8).

[19] Gould argues (1973: 85–8) in his definitive piece on supplication that Medea's supplication is figurative at first and that she does not perform the full act until 338. I believe that the change of plea is what counts with Creon. He threatens her with

rather her accepting the judgment and sentence of exile that persuades Creon to relent to her limited request. This would explain the chorus' despair in the first stasimon over the departure of *aidôs* ("respect") from Greece (439–40).[20] Creon's proprietary attitude to words is reinforced by a second sentence of exile and *death* for disobedience and by what were probably his last onstage words in the play (Diggle deletes 355–6): λέλεκται μῦθος ἀψευδὴς ὅδε (354), "this pronouncement has been said without falsehood."

To an audience of Athenians used to debating every issue this is the behavior of a tyrant, made all the more blatant by his saying that his is not a tyrannical disposition, "no, not at all" (ἥκιστα, 348), after appearing at a private house (which he has recently robbed of its master) with his bodyguard, and speaking and behaving in the peremptory tyrannical mode.[21] On the other hand his distrust of rhetoric (316, 319–20) would seem familiar enough to the audience,[22] but for him it is simplified by the fact that he does not need to use argument and reasoned debate to reach any understanding, to find the truth, or to make decisions.[23] His unjust treatment of Medea would show the audience (all but those lacking in the democratic spirit) that their way, fraught with peril as it is, is preferable to this brutish power without discussion. He will not be taken in by words, but he is tricked by his own paranoia into bringing the crisis to a head. His awareness of his fear (which, in spite of his saying that there are many contributing

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violence at 335, in itself a brutal act in response to her pleading, whether it is merely verbal or the completed act of formal ἱκετεία. Cairns (1993: 277–8) confirms Gould's interpretation of the scene: Creon gives in to the supplication because his other choice would be to use force which he finds unacceptable. While this is one way the scene could be played, and the ritual contact of supplication is important, and Creon is shown being aware of *aidôs* (though I do not agree with Cairns that he is "prone" to it), I believe that his *aidôs* is self-regarding and calculating rather than altruistic. There is no question but that he was at first inclined to reject her supplication (Cairns, 1993: 277).

[20] In general the chorus might be commenting on Jason's failure in his obligations towards his *philoi* (considered by the Nurse and discussed by Medea and the chorus) and his mistreatment of his hosts (to be brought up in later scenes), but for the immediate context, Creon's threat of violence to Medea (335, 354) during and after her supplication provide the immediate context of the choral remarks; see Cairns (1993: 272–91).

[21] See McGlew (1993: 26–8) on the tyrant's "misapplication of a principle of domestic domination to the city."

[22] Halliwell (1997: esp. 122–4) on the distrust of rhetoric voiced in tragedy.

[23] duBois (1991: 117), commenting on the Platonic dialogues (which, she believes, only imitate debate), writes, "The audience accustomed to the production of truth through argument in the workings of debate in the city takes pleasure in the theatrical representation of dialogue."

factors that cause it, is basically irrational) makes him relent enough to give Medea the time she needs.[24] He lists only two things that make him afraid: that Medea has special skills (so far in Corinth, as far as we know, used for the good, 11–2); and that he has heard reports that she has been making threats (which used to be more believable until textual scalpels excised her reported threat against the king and his daughter from the play).[25] Even Jason does not bear witness to her threats but only to her speaking ill of the royal family (453, 457–8). True, she curses them, along with herself, Jason, and the whole house, but that is not the same as threatening to do them harm. These threats may be merely figments of Creon's imagination and what he does in this scene is to suggest more victims to Medea, already bent on taking vengeance on Jason. So far, Medea, though a woman and foreigner, would be presenting a far more sympathetic case and one far more in keeping with Athenian expectations, since she, like the audience, has used arguments of various kinds, including the old favorite, that from what is likely (εἰκός at lines 306–10).

Just before Creon's entrance, the chorus has agreed to help Medea by keeping silence. They do so because Medea's cause is just (ἐνδίκως, 267). Medea has invited the women to participate in justice, which in Creon's Corinth has not been participatory. The hesitancy of these first steps is another indication of the novelty of their participation. How do people become politically moral and active? By making decisions, constantly. The chorus will be more politically intelligent and moral by the end of the play, after realizing that their support of Medea led to consequences far beyond their expectations and desires. After their announcement of his arrival, the chorus utters not another word until Creon is gone. Their respect, affection, loyalty for Creon is completely lacking. I might even venture to suggest that Page shows a slight cultural bias when he comments *ad* 138 that "the chorus has just had to *decide* between a conflict of loyalties—to Medea and to Kreon's house." On the contrary, their natural sympathies are with Medea. The treatment of her by her husband and by the king is unjust. Not long before the

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[24] See Pucci (1980: 208 n. 3), "He was not prepared to counteract this minimal request…"

[25] In fact what she has done (in the text) is curse the royals (along with herself, Jason, the children and the whole house) and spoken ill of them (according to Jason) but not made threats until *after* Creon has left. Most editors bracket 38–43 or some parts thereof: even this threat is part of Nurse's fear for her mistress' well-being.

arrival of the chorus, Jason's servant mouths Jason's side, the politics of self-interest: everyone acts for gain, a natural stance for him to take because he belongs to Jason. But the chorus of women, in the face of injustice, has no reason *not* to side with the wronged person. The women are represented as less corrupt than the men, less self-interested, and, as is natural to their condition as women, mostly confined to their homes, more naive.

Creon, by exiling Medea, has moved her plight from private (a purely domestic tragedy shared by and of interest to only her family, her servants, and her circle of women friends) to public (a concern to the state, here equivalent to the king). In fact, Creon, though arriving in state and issuing his sentence as a public proclamation, opens it rudely, but intimately, making reference to her facial demeanor and her most private life.[26]

In giving the reason for exiling her, Creon continues to mix public and private. He fears for his daughter's safety because Medea has a reputation for special skills (a charge she will answer in some detail in her next major speech) and because—what could be more personal than this?—she is upset over being deprived of her marital rights.[27] We must bear in mind that it is Creon who has broken up her marriage to Jason. A problem with monarchy generally is the inability to separate what is public from what is private: the monarch's household is a public institution and any others that it impinges upon become tainted by this politicizing. This is part of what makes the stories of royal houses so appealing even to the tragic poets of a democracy: they can give an added political dimension to private disasters. Creon goes on to mention his spies who report Medea's threats (287–9), again an inappropriate intrusion of the public into the private; and like other stage tyrants[28] to use military terminology of his dealings with a private person (289). His hostility is personal (290, 323) but with the word δυσμενής ("hostile," 323) he expands it to military enmity. The tyrant, like the fanatic (to paraphrase a bon mot of Amos Oz), has no private

[26] Falkner (1985: 76) thinks that the impression Creon makes is of "a grandfatherly figure." Considering that his last words on stage are "You will die: and this is no lie" (354), I find this doubtful. Of him Page says, "he knows he cannot play the remorseless tyrant for long. Throughout the scene he frowns to hide the sympathy in his eyes" (xiii).

[27] See Fartzoff (1996: 162).

[28] See Podlecki (1986: 98–100): "Taken to its limits, the treating of citizens as if they were troops is tyranny" (99).

life. In a tyranny no one can be secure: this is exactly what Medea's Nurse was talking about in her strange remarks (at 119 ff.) which Page and others take as referring to Medea, but of which Paley says (*ad* 120), "The allusion is obviously to Creon's stern decree." As Fartzoff (1996: 154) notes, the Nurse's reference (119) is the only use of *turannos* in a general formulation. The relevance of Nurse's remarks have been questioned,[29] but I prefer to see the lines as multireferential and therefore widely relevant: in the immediate context they refer to Creon and his daughter, to Jason, not content with life ἐπ' ἴσοισιν ("on equal terms," 122), and to Medea who eventually acquires the power to do as she wishes[30] and is also most immediately in Nurse's thoughts about the children. Tyranny is an abomination to nature because it confounds the categories of public and private, *polis* and *oikos*. Acting—unlike some of his well known historical colleagues—*not* out of personal lust, Creon has violated another household to take from it a partner for his daughter. The daughter has now become Medea's mistress (694, 970), not an appropriate relationship for a free woman.[31] Creon is not the worst of tyrants, a man with insatiable appetites, but he is drawn as one who assumes a master's power over the households of the city and who acts like a god in determining the fates of the residents.[32] When Medea pretends to accede to the tyrants' wishes she will extend this divine comparison: "Gifts persuade gods" (964) and

> κείνης ὁ δαίμων, κεῖνα νῦν αὔξει θεός,
> νέα τυραννεῖ (966–7)

> hers is the *daimôn*, and now a god will increase that;
> she is young in rule.

[29] By Elmsley and Wecklein, cited by Page *ad* 119.

[30] See Fartzoff (1997: 163, 167–8), who understands the expression πολλὰ κρατοῦντες (119) as going from the political to the psychological realms as Medea acquires her own authority.

[31] "For Aristotle, the tyrant establishes himself as a master of the city and inevitably treats his fellow citizens as slaves. This makes tyranny illegal, for, by the distinction that underlies Aristotle's political theory, master and slave belong to the household not the *polis* (*Pol.* 1252b16–7)," McGlew (1993: 27). See further McGlew (26–8) for stories of tyrants from Herodotus and Plato, pointing to the tyrants' powers over the public and the private. Cf. Podlecki on tyrants "inappropriately treating citizens as troops" (1986: 99–100).

[32] Cf. Plato, *R.* 360c and McGlew (1993: 26–7 n. 23).

In reality, however, the divine gifts come from Medea's family and, like Gyges' ring in the Platonic story, will allow *her* to do exactly what she wants.

Tyrants were known, too, for their great wealth and greed for more. This is why Jason can offer to pay Medea off "with unstinting hand" (ἀφθόνῃ . . . χερί, 612). In handing the lethal gifts to her children, Medea bids them enter πλουσίους δόμους (969, "the wealthy halls"). The girl's greed is highlighted in the description of her when she sees the gifts (1156), though the greed is later ameliorated when it turns into the pleasure a young girl takes in exquisite new clothes (1159–66). As it turns out the *daimôn* Medea refers to (966) is closer to that named with apprehension by the Nurse (130) when excess brings widespread destruction (cf. Creon's cry τίς . . . δαιμόνων; 1208, "what *daimôn*?"). By this time Medea's designation of Creon's daughter as ἡ τύραννος has built up a prominence for her as the principal enemy and victim (after Jason)—Creon having become just "anyone who touches her" (788)—in spite of her physical absence from the play. Once the princess is disposed of, the "enemies" are Jason.

Creon fears Medea because she is skilled: σοφὴ καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις, he calls her (285, "wise/skilled and knowledgeable in many evil things"). In Corinth she has used her skills to benefit the citizens. Why else would they speak of the house as having been made friendly to them (136–7)? Perhaps Creon has heard the story of her brief stay in Iolcus. On the other hand his fear of intelligent people might betray the stereotypical tyrant's fear of the most outstanding individuals (cf. 320). With good reason, Creon dismisses Medea's rational arguments. What more can they achieve than confirm him in his suspicions? The politics of the tyrant is the politics of self-interest, defined in the prologue by Jason's old slave: "Everyone loves himself more than his neighbor" (85–7), which he presents as a well-known fact. "I love you not more than my own house" (327), says Creon, confirming the old saw. A tyrant can (and does) get rid of anyone in his way. He rules for himself and his "friends" whom he can benefit by making the private property of others in the community public, that is, his own. When Creon gives in to Medea's pleas it is to the personal argument accompanied by gestures of complete submission and an appeal to his fatherhood and her own helplessness. Though a tyrant making his own laws, he loves his child like other men. To be a perfectly successful tyrant one would have to be without *philoi*. This causes a problem in a society in which benefitting friends is such an important cultural value.

Medea and Creon

Let us turn now to the details of Medea's part in the scene with Creon. Her immediate reaction to the sentence of exile is, of course, dismay. We already have the information from the previous messenger (the children's old servant) and are thus freed from suspense to concentrate on Creon's delivery and Medea's reactions. Realizing her defeated position (280) she is able nonetheless to open the dialogue by asking the reason for her exile (281). Argument is meaningless without knowing what is in his mind. And she is surprised by his answer, being used (as Verrall points out *ad* 306) to contempt and jealousy, she had never thought anyone would fear her. This is certainly disingenuous, in light of her past. Medea's response (beginning at 292) is her second educational speech. It is curious—given Creon's private reasons for wanting her out of the way—that Medea makes this wide-ranging political statement. Is Euripides depicting her as trying to change the terms of the debate, because in the personal terms in which Creon has framed it she has no argument? Personal animosities, like affections, are inarguable. Her concern for relations among citizens, between citizen and state, and more generally between individual and group is prominent here, as it was in her first speech to the Corinthian women. In the presence of Creon she is less egalitarian than she was when she spoke just to the Corinthian women. She addresses him impersonally as if she were addressing the *polis*, which, as absolute ruler, he is. She also flatters him by taking him into her confidence and sharing these thoughts, as if accepting him into the company of the intelligent few who can understand her subtle thinking and argumentation. And subtle it is: for she admits to being wise, proves herself a thinker, and at the same time rejects education in special skills, or is it simply education beyond what everyone else has? The argument does not work because Creon's fear of being "softened" by words (291, 316) overrides his ability to engage in the masculine art of reasoned debate.

Her reputation has done her great harm. She realizes how important to one's ability to persuade and to engage with one's fellows is their assessment of one's abilities. Someone too clever by half has to be even more clever to compensate for the hearers' healthy suspicion. Who are the audiences to whom this argument is addressed? Creon, the tyrant, who fears clever people and does his best to get rid of them. She means him to hear this positively: no one with all his faculties

intact (ἀρτίφρων) would train his children to be clever in excess.[33] The commercial metaphor she uses (296–7, Verrall *ad* 297) would appeal to Creon both as a Corinthian and as a tyrant. Not only are clever people (does she mean professionals of any kind or just philosophers?) unproductive in the commercial life of the *polis*, they also earn envy from the citizens as the price of their efforts. This is natural: in most settings anyone different is treated with hostility or suspicion, as Medea has already suggested in her first speech (215–24). Page and others believe that this is the voice of Euripides himself (as if the rest of the play were not). But it is a good argument and necessary to maintaining the political theme of the play through the first episode. If Creon were not so paranoid it could have been effective. To the Athenian audience it is more meaningful: they will certainly believe themselves more open-minded than Creon, but some of them at least will have to admit to being suspicious of professional wise men or at least to witnessing such suspicion in their more boorish fellow citizens. What she expresses here is the paradoxical reception of philosophers, as long as philosophy was practiced in the public realm, that we see in attitudes towards every thinker from Thales to Socrates: too shrewd to be trusted, too busy with their useless knowledge to notice what is under their feet. Her clear-sighted understanding of reputation is winning more acceptance from those who heard the words about prejudice in her first speech, the chorus and the audience: the message there had been not to reject a person on sight (220–1).

Next she considers two groups of people who despise a clever individual: the dim-witted, unimaginative people, suspicious of expertise (perhaps even more associated with magic then than now) who see any innovations as useless and other people with a reputation for special skills or wisdom (following Page's explanation *ad* 300–1): "if you are thought in the city superior to those who think they know something you will be resented (by them)." Her own case might be an example of what she means: she is well known in the city of Corinth. Any rivals will feel resentful. Or possibly her wide reputation in the city has made Creon take notice: residents in a tyranny who are noticed get their heads lopped off. Finally (diverging from Page) as a foreigner

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[33] See Verrall (1881: *ad* 294): "special education is represented as disturbing the natural balance."

(she had talked about this in her speech to the women) Medea might be resented in the city for being superior to their native σοφοί: as in Parmeniskos' version of the myth (Σ *ad* 264) in which the "Corinthian women, refusing to be ruled by a woman who was a foreigner and a witch, plotted against her and killed her children, seven boys and seven girls..." If Euripides was aware of this version he might be making reference to it here. Medea concludes this part of the speech with the personal relevance: she has a reputation. Having set up her argument she now denies that she is so very clever. Whatever skill she has is within moderation (not περισσῶς, 295; οὐκ ἄγαν, 305). Her argument is well taken: yes, there are people who are very clever. These people are resented both by the ignorant and the intelligent, but she is not one of them. She is no threat. In her straitened circumstances (280, 307) she is powerless.[34] Politically this is appealing to both the onstage tyrant and the outer Athenian audience: she is a good democrat, not striving to be better than others, and a permissible subject, being powerless and acceptably intelligent or skilled.

Medea's next argument is the old standard: the argument from probability (εἰκός, 309–13). She has reason to be angry with her husband for deserting her, but not with Creon. Unfortunately the argument is in this instance deeply flawed—as this type of argument in tragedy often is, because it ignores the particulars—since the person to whom Creon's heart led him to give his daughter was Medea's husband. She cannot separate Creon and his daughter from the defection of Jason. Her sound political instincts, her understanding—displayed in both her major speeches so far—that people do not exist on their own, but in relation to the community, should have saved her from this specious reasoning.

Nevertheless this is a remarkable speech, coming from a woman, addressed by her to a man on terms of equality, only yielding to him in power and resources.[35] In it she recommends an educational policy not of elitist overspecialization, but of moderation and usefulness to the community, an argument that has gained, if not respectability, at least popularity over the millennia and into the era of universal education.

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[34] On Medea's use of short sentences and strong mid-line punctuation to communicate simplicity and artlessness, see Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 303–15).

[35] For a well-considered treatment of the types of argumentation in this scene see Williamson (1990: 20–2).

This type of discourse is usually the private reserve of males in the *polis*. The difficulty of finding the relevance of this passage has led commentators to suggest that Euripides has events of his contemporary scene in mind (Verrall and Page, for example).

Medea has to answer the charge of being a *sophê*. She does this by way of a disclaimer: her reputation exceeds her *sophia*. She does not even approve of excess education since it causes political *phthonos* (297, "envy" or "enmity"). Does she then demonstrate her less than superlative skill through a faulty argument that is in part passionate, as women are supposed to be (ἐμὸν πόσιν μισῶ, "I hate my husband," 310–1) rather than reasoned, because Creon fears being softened with rhetoric? She concludes with an offer of submission, in answer to Creon's objection to her alleged threats against him and the newly-weds. Creon rejects her argument because as absolute monarch he does not need to listen to reason. She is reduced to supplication, submission, and flattery. Creon rejects the supplication (or at least waits until she assumes the full suppliant position) but falls for the flattery and submission. He, as a good father, is contrasted with Jason, who cares nothing for his children.

In this scene Creon has used words to define people according to his own feelings. His naming of his likes and dislikes is a means of expressing his power. He characterizes Medea as sullen and angry (271) and for this declares her an exile. He next defines her as clever and knowledgeable and guilty of unrestrained speech (285, 287–9), but when she offers to be silent (315), he expresses his preference for the quick-tempered person over the silent, clever one even though he is exiling her because of her outspoken anger (319–20). He defines the role she is to play ultimately in the play as the ὀξύθυμος (319, "quick to come to righteous wrath" as used in *Eumenides* 705 by Athena at the founding of Areopagus court) who is also clever enough to hide her anger when necessary. Before her last act of violence she must rouse this wrath one more time.

Medea and the Chorus

After Creon leaves, the political balance shifts. Medea begins to take the power.

Let us consider briefly Medea's developing relations with the chorus. The women enter after hearing a cry from inside the stage building (135). It is as if one house were calling to the others, each member of

the chorus representing one private *oikos* in the city.[36] The disembodied voice we hear becomes almost the voice of the ailing house.

The parodos is a splendid, operatic scene: Nurse, chorus, Medea, singing about justice (157), tyranny (119 ff.), democracy (122–3), the three parties not yet connecting. It is clear that the chorus is predisposed to Medea's side long before her great speech. Ζεύς σοι τάδε συνδικήσει (157, "Zeus will be your advocate in this"). The chorus of women put the desertion of one *numpha* ("young bride," 150, of Medea) for another (163, of Creon's daughter) into a legal setting: in the cosmic court of justice, Zeus will act as Medea's advocate (cf. *Eumenides* 579 where Apollo makes himself Orestes' advocate and/or co-defendant; see Sommerstein *ad loc.*). Medea picks up this theme with "Themis" (160) and Nurse chimes in (169–70) with "Themis and Zeus ὅρκων ταμίας" ("keeper of oaths") and the chorus ends with "Zeus and Themis of oaths" who brought Medea to Greece (209–12). Here is a marshaling of powerful and righteous (political and cosmic) forces to Medea's side. Or has Themis become Jason's fellow-worker in the betrayal?

The political disposition of the chorus is established from the very beginning and their politics has to do with the *oikos*. These women, though confined to private life, represent the people of Corinth, a *polis* made up of those *oikoi*. Since the citizens do not engage in politics because of the nature of Creon's rule, the relationship of these women, formed into a group at the end of the parodos, both among themselves and to Medea, *is* the political life of the drama.[37] The fact that Creon ignores them and they feel nothing for him, now or at his reported death (which has been made all the more pitiful by the messenger when he turns it into a type-scene of the aged mourner beside his fallen child),[38] says something about civic life in Corinth.

In Medea's (first) great educational speech (214 ff.) she tells what she has learned from her experiences: it might—along with her other experiences in the play, especially those with Greek men—tell us something about how a foreigner is Hellenized. At once she is other and one of us, alien and familiar.

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[36] See Martina (1993: 587).

[37] Foley (2003: 24) points out that the chorus in *Medea* is not indifferent to moral points and writes, "Moreover…female choruses often prove to be deeply concerned with the status of their city." On choral identity see Allan (2002: 26).

[38] Falkner (1995: 178), "The single most frequent scene in Euripides is that of the elderly in mourning over their loved ones."

"Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house," she says (214), as if she were addressing an assembly or a jury: and these women, at the end of her *apologia*, find in her favor unanimously.[39] Medea is playing to an audience and she even talks about other people as spectators.[40]

> so that you will not hold anything against me. I know that
> many people
> are standoffish, some in the privacy of home
> and others in the public sphere. Some people, because the are shy,
> have acquired the ill repute of indifference.
> There is no justice in people's perception:
> there are some who, before they know a person inside out,
> hate him on sight, even if they have never been wronged
> by him. (215–21)

ὀμμάτων ἄπο ("out of sight," 216) can be said to describe Medea in the parodos when she remained hidden, speaking through her house; ἐν θυραίοις (217) is quite literally her present position. She is liminal and separate, not in the chorus, but potentially at least like them.[41] Her actions here are to avoid their blame which would be a way of making them see her actively as "not one of them." She is trying to win them over, make them more involved in her life; to make herself one of them. This is a political act, and also aesthetic and practical: she needs them. She places herself among them by coming out to address them and to explain herself and ask for their help. When Creon comes on, the chorus is silent until he leaves.

In the first part of this episode, I would put Medea in the orchestra with the chorus. In the Creon scene the blocking would be different: the chorus would withdraw to the circumference so that the chorus (and audience) act not as participants, but as witnesses only. The presence of an audience also explains why Medea is grief-stricken in private and collected in public. Like a poet or actor she presents herself, tells her story, revising her past, revising her feelings about marriage and her particular marriage that her Nurse had related. From being a woman

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[39] See duBois (1991: 20), "The chorus has the collective character of a jury." Also Ober and Strauss (1990: 238), "the physical settings of mass meetings of the people—the Pnyx and the Theater of Dionysos—were very similar in terms of spatial organization." And "The seating in the theater was egalitarian as it was in the Assembly and in the people's courts." Of course they are not talking about women.

[40] On Medea as a consummate actor see Griffiths (2006: 64, 80) and Zerba (2002: 315 ff.).

[41] On displacement, see Williamson (1990: 18); Luschnig (1992: 34).

who believed in the institution of matrimony she has moved to a clearer realization that there is little benefit in marriage for women. Though illegitimate children belong to the woman the children she had by Jason are not hers: Jason will claim them as his when he wants them.[42] Medea calls these women, her audience, φίλαι ("loved ones, friends"), over and over (227, 377, 765, 797, 1116, 1236). Later she will reject them. At that time it is because they do try to keep her as one of themselves when they beg her not to kill her children, trying to protect her from being even more unhappy and alien than she currently is. She tells them that they have not suffered as she has, separating herself from them. But by then she has a wider audience. Creon makes her plight public. Aigeus widens the audience still further. Her exile and place of asylum give the story an international scope and bring it home to Athens from a foreign, rival city.

Yes, she transgresses by coming into the male/public sphere,[43] but the address is to women who have requested her presence to comfort her, to show friendliness, to say to her the word φίλα (182). That is not what is out of place here. No, it is the speech itself which is alarming.

Though a woman talking to women she puts her thoughts into political terms, speaking of justice (219), of reputation and prejudice (220–1), of citizens and aliens (223–4), and more important, of the relation of the individual to the community in general. "Some people of a quiet way of life," she continues "get a bad reputation for ῥᾳθυμία" (218, "inactivity, indifference"): of this Paley writes (*ad* 218), "essentially an Athenian sentiment, for it was difficult for any citizen to live wholly ἀπράγμων, keeping out of the vortex of politics and the popular assembly." Obviously not so difficult for a woman.

> A stranger must adapt to the city;
> but I also do not approve of a citizen who is self-willed
> and therefore offensive to the citizens out of insensitivity. (222–4)

Ἀμαθία ("ignorance, apathy, insensitivity," 224) is not just an intellectual flaw, but a moral deficiency.[44]

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[42] On the importance of the *agôn* between Jason and Medea and especially his calling them "my children" for Medea's motivation to kill the children, see Barlow (1995: 41) and Gill (1996: 154–74).

[43] See Reckford (1968: 29–30).

[44] Verrall (1881: *ad* 223), "more particularly it is the want of feeling for others, in all shades from cruelty down to rudeness."

The speech is perhaps more agglutinative or meditative than coherent.[45] She has come out so that they, the women of Corinth, will not blame her. She puts blame into a general background of people who are different (here, σεμνούς, "solemn, aloof, proud" and so, perhaps, "standoffish," 216).[46] What does this have to do with women or with herself? In spite of its generalizing tone it is more particular to her own situation, because unlike most women she does have a public persona. She then divides them (people who are different) into foreigners and natives (222–4): this is clearly leading up to her own case. She ends this part with herself and the shocking thing that has happened to her.

> But for me this unexpected disaster
> has wrecked my life. I am cast adrift. I have lost
> all pleasure in living and I want to die, my friends.
> The man who was everything to me, try to understand this,
> has turned out to be the vilest man alive, my own husband. (225–9)

Her life is over. She wants to die, because her husband on whom she depended absolutely has turned out to be κάκιστος ("most vile," 229). Of all men—who are in general unjust—she has singled *one* out, Jason. She has moved from general to particular: μοι . . . πόσις ("to me . . . my husband," 228–9).

> Of all creatures that have life and reason
> we women are the sorriest lot:
> first we must at a great expenditure of money
> buy a husband and even take on a master
> over our body: this evil is more galling than the first. (230–4)

She progresses next (230 ff.) from people in general (the default people are men) to women. Women are, of all animate and cognizant creatures, the sorriest (230–1). First a woman has to buy a husband (232–4), as if women "negotiated the exchange."[47] But Medea did buy her husband. Are her words here general or particular? Is she suggesting a way (to these women and to the audience) of thinking about marriage from a woman's point of view? Taking a master for the body (of her sexuality,

[45] See Schadewalt (1966: 189). On the ideology of the speech, Pucci (1980: 61–77); Friis-Johansen (1959: 148).

[46] See Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 216) for the negative use of σεμνός as a "reflection of the egalitarian ethos of Athenian democracy."

[47] As Williamson puts it (1990: 18–9).

233), like a slave (δεσπότης, "master"; the word suggests its opposite, δοῦλος, "slave"): but in real commerce it is the other way around: the master buys the slave.

> Here is the most challenging contest, whether we will
>   get a bad man
> or a good one. Besides, divorce is unsavory
> for a woman and it is not possible to say no to one's husband.
> And when she comes into new customs and rules
> a woman must be a prophet of what she could never
>   learn at home:
> how best to deal with her marriage partner;
> and if we get it worked out well and a husband shares
> our life with us, and he bears the yoke without violence,
> life is to be envied. Otherwise we are better off dead. (235–43)

Again (at 235) she states the question as an epistemological problem. The crucial ἄγων ("contest, struggle") is whether one is to get a bad husband or a good one: because women as a rule do not get a second chance (236–7) and they do not have the right to refuse their husband (237), which is the point of δεσπότην σώματος (233). But Medea does get a second chance and she chooses the second king who comes to visit her in the play because with him she can have a relationship of mutual dependency and support. But each, unfortunately, is to betray the other before their contractual relationship begins, Aigeus by disobeying the oracle (and begetting a son elsewhere) and Medea by making herself a deadly enemy to the heirs of Creon.

How does this relate to Medea's inventing herself at each occasion and to the politics of the scene? Euripides has made her one Medea in the house, another with the chorus, another with Creon. These bleed together. She reinvents herself for the particular audience (and she even talks about the problems of inventing the right self). A self is always invented. Medea—as a woman, as a foreigner—has had to create a self to conform to the city. As a woman and foreigner she has had to learn and to keep learning what that means vis-à-vis the alien group.

Every woman is a stranger who has to learn new customs and ways which she could not have learned at home: the common ground between Medea and these women is subtly extended. Medea represents it (242) as though women could work things out in such a way that the man would accept his married state without violence (βία is also a characteristic of the master-slave relationship).

> But the man, when he is bored with things at home
> he can go out to ease the weariness of his heart.[48]
> But we have just one person to look to.
> They say that we live a life free of danger
> at home while they face battle with the spear.
> How wrong they are. I would rather stand three times
> in the line of battle than once bear a child. (244–51)

Now she turns to a discussion of men. Earlier she had divided humans into strangers and citizens. Men have it easier: they have freedom of movement. They are not, like women, confined inside the house. Women depend on *one* person. But she overwhelms the men's self-claimed superiority with the triumph of women in facing danger—women's heroism is equated to that of men; in fact it is even greater (three times greater).[49]

> But the same story does not apply to you and me.
> You have this city and your father's home,
> enjoyment of life, and the companionship of friends,
> but, alone and without a city, I am abused
> by my husband, carried off as plunder from a foreign land,
> I have no mother, no brother, no relative
> to offer me a safe haven from this disaster.
> I ask you this one small favor:
> if some way or means can be found
> to make my husband pay for this abuse
> [and the father of the bride and the bride herself][50]
> —keep it silent. (252–63)

In the last part Medea isolates herself (as she had done at the end of the first section). All women enter their marital homes as outsiders. But as a political *xenos* ("foreigner"), the *oikos* she formed with Jason is *all* there is for her. As a foreigner she is truly alone; the members of the chorus have their ancestral homes, families, and friends. Medea is

[48] Line 246 inanely adds "visiting some friend or companion," which may be a pedant's interpolation to clean up the text. A man might have a mistress or visit the brothels, besides resorting to his friends' parties, where respectable women did not go. Jason did more than see friends; he negotiated another marriage.

[49] "Death in childbirth was creditable just as death in battle was," Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 248–51).

[50] Many editors bracket this line (262; "father of the bride" is literally "the one who gave his daughter to him") on the grounds that Medea's threat to the king and his daughter is too readily accepted by the chorus. This is not, I believe, a convincing argument against the line. The chorus offers all its fellow-feeling to Medea and seems to have little or no sympathy for Creon.

without a *polis* (255). Once again she has been forced to learn new ways that she could not learn at home (μὴ μαθοῦσαν οἴκοθεν, 239): we see her still learning throughout the play.

She revises the story of her past to say of herself λελῃσμένη ("carried off as part of the loot," 256) as if she had left her home under compulsion, to insist that this was not a regular marriage, but that she was carried off like a prisoner of war or the spoils of a pirates' raid. That indeed is how Jason is treating her now, like part of the plunder from a barbarian land, certainly not as his lawful wife, since he has taken a second wife, without divorcing the first and returning her and her dowry to her family. Later he will claim, as one of his favors to her, that he made her a Hellene. But his treatment of her as a foreign wife who could be kept as a concubine while he married another, native Greek, wife gives the lie to that.

She has no *mother* (257, as the women of the chorus would have, to stand by them in childbirth and to prepare them for marriage, to be with them at the transitions of life and for the many annual rituals, if not more generally); no brother (257) who would be a natural protector and κύριος ("guardian") in the absence of her father, no kin of any kind to offer refuge. She left her home with the hero; she needed no protector then. In truth she is and has always been her own protector. Of course she is being disingenuous here because she killed her brother for Jason. She is inventing a self for the particular audience she is facing now, the women of the chorus who have a more conventional and more confined life story. She reminds them of what they have: not as much as men, but more than she. And this is a political argument: she is showing them the value of having a *polis* by contrast to herself the *apolis* woman.[51]

And so she asks for the chorus' support, at least to keep silent and by their silence to agree with her that vengeance is required (259–63).

> For a woman in all other things is full of fear
> and a coward when it comes to looking on deeds of valor
> and the sword
> but when she is wronged in her marriage
> there is no heart more bloodthirsty. (263–6)

[51] On the importance of this aspect of the play and the character see Friedrich (1993: *passim*).

It has been suggested,[52] not unreasonably, that she undercuts her own words at the end of the speech. But is that altogether so? "A woman is full of fear, a coward when it comes to looking at the sword or deeds of valor, but when she is hurt in her marriage..." Medea has already told us what she thinks of war compared to childbearing and why marriage is so important to women. For Medea deeds of valor, men's heroism, are nothing compared to women's: this is what she teaches the chorus. And she has rejected as wrong-headed the usual lie about women (248–50) that they lead lives without danger. Does this masculinize her? I am not sure, since she does keep intact the structural distinction (men are valuable as warriors, women as mothers). Men have often in the past killed their innocent children to advance a war. In the heroic male undertaking, it is permissible to sacrifice whatever is in the way. Medea transfers this to the women's world and we are shocked, but there would have been no other way to make Jason and the world know what their disparagement of women means. "You had the gall to kill them because of your marriage (bed)." "Do you think this is a trifling matter for a woman?" (1367–8). She reforms the servile status of women. Aigeus, up to a point, thinks she should accept it (699), but not so the women of the chorus. Medea changes the structures: women are a match for men, but they have their own arena in the family, their own weapons (the *pharmaka* in which they are skilled), and their own means (the children). Each side also has words of blame to use against the other.[53]

The chorus agrees to abet her revenge by keeping silence: no time to think: here comes Creon. The chorus in this play (as in many others) provides a useful function (in one of its roles): as the naive audience (also called the "narrative audience" believing or pretending to believe, since they are performers themselves, that the story is true, is actually happening).[54] Agreeing with Medea when she is in the right, trying to stop her when she goes too far, wanting to save the children, as if children were really being killed inside. They add a dimension to our experience by experiencing in reality and real time what we experience

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[52] By Margaret Williamson (1990: 28). See Pucci's sensitive remarks about Medea's speaking of women "with the abusive language of society" (1980: 64).

[53] See McClure (1999: 383), "But Medea does more than insult her husband: she constructs an almost literary invective against him by revealing his self-serving cowardice."

[54] See Rabinowitz (1993: 127–30 and 146–50).

as fiction and by experiencing as a group what we can for the most part now only experience as individuals. The chorus is one guide to reactions to a play. It does not tell us what the original audience felt at each given time in the play. Some members of the Athenian audience of 431 B.C.E. must have been more surprised by Medea's remarks about marriage than the chorus appears to be, for example. But the chorus does present a possible reaction by women to this highly charged political statement.

The complementarity of male/female roles is usually reflected in the *polis/oikos* polarity. But Medea is the *diplomat*. Her role both affirms and breaks down the male/female *polis/oikos* distinction.

- In the past she had welcomed the strangers to her foreign shores, losing in the process the family of her birth.
- With the daughters of Pelias she negotiated (deceitfully) to rejuvenate their father, winning more enemies for herself and her family by marriage and motherhood.
- In Corinth she has won over the citizens (lines 11–2 and Σ *ad loc.*: she used spells to cure them). The chorus has come to *her* house in open sympathy with *her*. This suggests:
  1. a women's network in domestic and ritual spheres
  2. that women accept diversity. Medea is of less regular *modus vivendi* than they, but their shared womanhood overcomes barriers of alterity.
- Creon deals directly with her. (Is this his self-serving way of denying her connection with Jason? An acknowledgment that her power is on a par with his?)
- She deals with Aigeus and controls the negotiation. This suggests that she moves in spheres not usually open to women: heroic and royal orbits.
- In the mission to Creon. Jason is out of the loop. The gifts remove Jason as a player: the children bring the gifts to Creon's daughter, who is to persuade Creon, who will make a decision about the children's fate.

The life without danger inside the house, attributed to women by men, is not the life Medea has led. Instead she deals with the other οἶκοι and she teaches the women of the chorus their political and domestic roles.

Politics of the Choral Odes

First Stasimon (410–45)

Strophe — Back flow streams of holy rivers and justice
and all things (πάντα, the universe) are being turned back.
For men's counsels are deceitful, and the pledge taken in the gods' name is no longer firmly fixed.
Legends will change my life so that it will have glory; honor comes to the female of the species;
the cacophony of rumors will set women free.

Antistrophe — The Muses will cease from their ancient-born songs singing of our faithlessness.
For not to our mind has Phoebus, the leader of tunes, granted the inspired song of the lyre;
since then I would sing a song in response
to the race of men. But long life has
much to tell of our side and of men's.

Strophe — You sailed from your father's home
with maddened heart between the double rocks of the sea
and you live on foreign soil,
desolate, without a man in your marriage bed,
poor woman, now an exile from this land
you are driven away without rights.

Antistrophe — But the grace of oaths has gone; respect no more
abides in vast Hellas, but it has flown to the skies
and you no more have the house of your father,
to shelter you, poor woman,
from troubles. And over the bed
another queen more powerful stands now in the
chamber.[55] (410–45)

The chorus has just seen their king Creon use his power to destroy a helpless woman and her children because of personal animosity and they have felt her justified indignation at his intrusion into her private

[55] Kovacs (1994: *ad* 445): "And another princess, greater match than yourself holds sway in the house."

life. Even after hearing her threats to avenge herself by actually killing three of her enemies (Jason, Creon and his daughter) they continue to see her side as just.[56] And in reaction they sing of a complete reversal in the natural world which is caused by or at least accompanies the change in their experience of reality when women will receive τιμά ("honor, recompense") and good reputation (415–9).[57] It has never happened before. Rivers flow upstream; the whole universe is turned backward.[58] And what of δίκα (411)? Justice or natural order or both?[59] The chorus is using themes from epic and scientific poetry, and so the earlier meaning of δίκη (Page *ad* 411: *iustus rerum ordo*) is more than likely present here in the immediate cosmic context. But they have also quite recently spoken of the right on Medea's side and δίκη is also political (a context obviously in the chorus' and audience's mind from the scene just ended, a trial of sorts, unfairly weighted against the defendant, in which Medea is unjustly treated and promises to even the score). Things are changing: women will finally get τιμά (419, "recompense, honor, value") as part of the general upheaval. They draw these conclusions from Jason's betrayal and Creon's injustice. Medea has made them see the impossibility not only of her position but of their own and so they generalize about the roles of women and men (414, 416). The debate squelched by Creon continues here: the women are learning to think about their lives (and they continue to make intellectual advances throughout the play, showing, not proving, that not only virtue, but craft or art can be taught). Men, not women, are deceitful (412). Men do not deserve a good reputation. They have it only because women do not have a voice (424–5). If they did they would have plenty to say (426–30). The women are stunned by what they have just heard and seen. They begin to engage in the art of the city, that is, politics.

Medea had claimed that for her Jason was her universe and implied that this dependancy on a man extends to all women (247). If men are not worthy then women must assume rights. Τιμά (416) here means

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[56] On female choruses overstepping conventional limits, see Foley (2003: 22), "Even the chorus of *Medea*, although it should have sided with its ruler Creon, can, in principle, as a group of free women, decide to side with justice and Medea."

[57] See McClure (1999: 388–90) on this "palinode for women." She says (389), "And yet, the chorus imply that such a reversal of discourse and action could only occur in a world turned upside down..." This reversal of things, however, has already happened. The subject of women's invective against men is already there in the treason of Jason and the injustice of Creon and the chorus is already singing of them.

[58] Verrall (1881: *ad* 411) takes πάντα as a "term of poetical physics."

[59] See Verrall (1881) and Page (1938: *ad loc.*).

"reward" or "recompense," but we may remember what has happened to Medea, deprived of rights (ἠτιμασμένη, 20, and later ἄτιμος, 438) because she is not a man and is without a man, so that the sense of civic rights and protections a woman would have through her husband and guardian cannot be excluded.

The antistrophe is more hesitant. Songs will cease to be about women's infidelity (423), but they do not yet have anything to replace them because women are without the gift of song. That is beginning to be untrue, since they are here clearly performing a spontaneous song about the wrongs perpetrated by men against women.[60] The women of the chorus are starting their training now with this, their first formal ode. The old songs, because they are men's songs, and men are liars, are false (421). The universe is in revolt or perhaps just flux. It may take some time for it to reach a balance because δίκα is spinning (411).

From the general reflection they move now to the particular, to Medea (as she had done in her first major speech). They express compassion for her, especially the aspects of her life that differ from their own: she has no country, no father, she lives in a foreign land deserted by her husband who brought her there, and now, without rights, she is driven into exile (431–8). This fact of foreignness and loss of *polis* is something they keep coming back to. Her apolitical status is what is most troubling to them in the next song. And why is Medea's status so desperate? Because Greek men are not true to their oaths and because *aidôs* ("respect for others, shame," which, with *dikê*, is necessary for humans to live in community and was given to them by Zeus so that they would not be annihilated; cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 322c–d) is gone from Greece (439). The chorus is outdoing the pessimistic Hesiod for whom *aidôs* does not depart until the fifth (iron) age (*Op.* 199). Several common themes suggest that Euripides may have had this Hesiodic complaint in mind (see esp. 193–4, "crooked counsels," δολίαι βουλαί, 412; cf. μύθοισι σκολιοῖς, *Op.* 194; and δυσκέλαδος, "ill-sounding," 420 and *Op.* 196 and the invective against women that is here being reversed).[61]

Only in the last lines does the focus move from cosmic to domestic and state politics. *Aidôs* disappears from the world of men with Creon's refusal of the suppliant and with Jason's broken oaths and the crooked

[60] On the chorus' challenge to the male poetic see Allan (2002: 57–8).

[61] On the *topos* of the "departure of *aidôs* from a decadent world" see Cairns (1993: 273, 340). Cairns sees the chorus' comment (339–400) as referring to Jason's "breach of *philia*" (273 n. 30), but I find a wider context that includes reference to the scene just played with Creon's grudging and mean acceptance of Medea's supplication.

counsels of both. Into the domestic scene has intruded a royal personage, βασίλεια κρείσσων, in the chamber with Jason that was once Medea's place (444–5). Once again it is the unequal politics of the strong against the weak. And there is a hint of the crime against the natural divisions which Creon as tyrant has committed. The relevance of the ode may be to the future promise of Medea, but is unquestionably to the past deeds of both Creon and Jason, measured against whom women's reputation takes a turn for the better. And of course it points forward to the arrival of the utterly shameless man, Jason. Is the promise of this ode fulfilled by the play? A new song for women? In displaying the power of the oppressed, yes. In presenting a woman who is the equal of any man, yes. And, yes, in its offer of recompense. But in showing women using power better than men, probably no. Does Euripides reinscribe the invective against women (cf. McClure 1999: 379)? I think not, even though he has Jason denounce Medea at the end as μέγιστον ἐχθίστη γύναι ("most hatefulest woman," 1323). Jason's invective against Medea is particular: in his mind no Greek woman would have done such a thing (1339–40). He even believes in the possibility of a woman being *sôphrôn* ("virtuous," 1369), though this comes in a passage that is self-contradictory.[62] But the play is not a political pamphlet and we should not expect a positivist moral, but rather a vertiginous swirling of emotions and ideas as we gulp or gag at the edge of the abyss.[63]

Second Stasimon (627–62)

Strophe Love coming on too strong
does not give glory or virtue

[62] "You killed them because of your marriage bed." "Do you think this is a negligible thing for a woman?" "Yes, if she is virtuous." (1368–70) Marriage is everything for a woman. Suppose we turned the tables and substituted war for marriage?

[63] Gregory (2002: 160–1) argues that Euripides was a social critic rather than a social activist, concluding, "The fact that Euripides lodges such similar protests against the stereotyping of three very different groups [slaves, women, and bastards] suggests that while he goes out of his way to question received ideas, he is far less interested in emending the actual position of these marginalized members of society" (161). But because Euripides is a playwright working within the conventions of tragedy, how can we tell? He is doubtless contributing to the intellectual and political debate. Gregory believes (160) that Euripides' evaluating individual slaves for their νοῦς "is not conducive to social reform." Euripides' tools, however, are not issues, but characters, so that using the individual against the stereotype is the dramatist's way of debunking the stereotype.

to men. But if Kypris comes in moderation,
no other goddess is so gracious.
Never, oh goddess, may you let fly at me an
inescapable arrow
from your golden bow, drenching it in desire.

Antistrophe
But let soundness of mind love me,
the finest gift of the gods.
Never may dreaded Kypris hit me with
quarrelsome angers and insatiable strife,
after stinging my heart for another bed,
but honoring a warless match, may she wisely
discern
the loves of women.[64]

Strophe
O fatherland, o home,
may I not be stateless,
leading a life of helplessness,
hard to get through,
full of the most pitiable sorrows.
Let me die, yes, die,
before reaching that day;
of troubles there is no other beyond
separation from one's native land.

Antistrophe
I have seen it, I do not have this story
to reflect upon from others;
no city, no friend
pities you, as you suffer
the most terrible of sufferings.
Without grace may he perish for whom
it is possible not to honor loved ones
unbolting his heart in pure love.
He will never be a friend of mine. (627–62)

Following the vicious debate scene in which the chorus speaks only twice, once with a cliché to set the speeches apart (520–1) and then to express their disapproval of Jason's rhetorical exercise cloaking his unjust betrayal (576–7), the chorus sings of love, lust, and homelessness.

[64] See below on Page's interpretation (1938: *ad loc.*).

Though the chorus is now less "theatrically stunning"[65] than in the first stasimon, political elements remain, mixed in. Their first-hand witnessing of Medea's fate leads them to project for themselves the loss of fatherland. Nothing could be worse. To be without a *polis* (645, 656) is the saddest thing they can imagine (647, 652–3): that is, not to lose one's husband or children, but one's country. They are, then, more *polis*-centered than their king, to whom his child meant more than his country (329). Without a *polis* one has no *philoi*.

"Loves in excess do not bring *aretê* to *men* (males, 627–30)," but there must be enough love. Jason is not in love with either of his wives. He suffers from (and later will suffer as a result of) a deficiency of love. It looks as if the chorus has reversed the gender roles from the previous scene. Medea loved in excess and lost everything. And the chorus, though pointedly referring to *men*, applies this sentiment to themselves (ἐμοί, 633, "to me") through her example. They wish for the virtue of *sôphrosunê* lest love lead to strife (635–41) as it has in the scene just past, or lest strife at home lead to the husband's straying. They are ambiguous about whose *thumos* is smitten for other loves (637–40).[66]

> Wisely may the goddess of love judge women's marriages,
> respecting those without strife...(641–2, following Page).

That is, not upsetting them by smiting the husband (or either partner) with a roving eye.

The theme of friendship, after the strophe on homelessness, is prominent in the second antistrophe (656, 660, 662). Jason has betrayed his personal *philoi*, his family, to form a political friendship, the motivation to which he admits in the second episode. The last lines of the second antistrophe apply to all of Jason's relationships (659–62):

> Without *charis* may he perish for whom
> it is possible not to honor loved ones
> "opening clean his heart" (Verrall).
> He will never be a friend to me. (659–62)

Whatever his motives, Jason's dealings with friends are underhanded and entirely self-interested.

[65] Gould (in Silk, 1996: 229).

[66] For the interpretation of these lines that they are referring to "a second bed...that might allure their husbands" see Meridor (1986: 95).

Medea has no friends because she is a foreigner. Jason is a false friend, despite his self-serving claims in the previous scene. The chorus ends on the note of friendlessness, and Aigeus, a foreign king, enters with a greeting to Medea as a friend (664). He is a king, but they talk as equals, Medea only temporarily putting herself in a posture of submissiveness. He is a foreigner in Corinth, and yet a figure familiar to the audience, the famous father of their founding father. His reason to be there tells us where we are in his story (besides giving him thematic relevance) and reminds us, as it were, of the future: Medea's part in his life and the trip he will take to Trozen. He is not a tyrant like Creon, and so sets Creon apart. Aigeus is desperate for a royal heir and sets about his quest by going to the oracle and consulting other heroes. This puts him in contrast to Jason who simply takes another wife to bear royal children and improve his status. The oracle Aigeus relates, political as usual, will remind us of the story of Theseus' birth and perhaps of its recipient's tragic end. Medea does not attempt to interpret it, but instead promises to cure his condition in Athens with drugs. Euripides does not interfere with the legend by having Medea explain what the oracle means and thus make the trip to Trozen to consult Pittheus unnecessary. The thought is planted that Medea could have been the mother of Theseus (or of Aigeus' heir) and his tragic end avoided if he had understood and obeyed the oracle; Medea's tragic departure after her attempt on Theseus' life would also have been avoided.[67] Aigeus is eager to honor her supplication and to take advantage of her promise and, good Athenian that he is, he agrees to receive her in Athens, land of asylum, friendly to the resident alien.[68] The chorus who uttered not a sound in Creon's presence, wishes Aigeus a fair journey.

Third Stasimon (824–65)

Strophe
Children of Erechtheus, wealthy[69] of old
and children of the blessed gods,
from a land holy and unconquered, feeding
on most glorious wisdom always
stepping delicately through the brightest air,

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[67] But she is not a seer until her final scene.

[68] For the idea that Aigeus came to Corinth purposely to consult Medea see Browne (1952: 76–7). See also Dunkle (1969: 98, 104) and Sfyroeras (1995: 127–8, 141–2).

[69] "Wealthy," ὄλβιοι. Cf. Solon 13. Before the reforms of Solon, Athens was so poor that freemen were indenturing themselves for debt. Cf. Thucydides 1.2.5.

There once they say the nine Muses of Pieria
gave birth to Golden Harmony.

Antistrophe They sing the tale that Kypris
drawing water at the streams of fair-flowing
  Kephisos breathes gentle sweet-smelling
auras of winds over the land; and always putting
on her hair a fragrant garland of rose blossoms,
she sends the Loves, co-workers with wisdom,
helpers of every sort of excellence.

Strophe How then will the city of holy rivers,
the land that gives safe-passage
to friends,
welcome you, child-killer,
not holy with the others?
Look at the blow to the children;
look at the murder you are committing.
Do not, at your knees,
in every way we beseech you,
do not kill your children.

Antistrophe Where will you get the boldness
of mind or for your hand or heart,
bringing to them terrible daring?
And, how, casting your eyes
upon the children will you have a share
in their murder without weeping? No, you cannot
—when your children fall begging—
wet your hand in blood
with an iron-willed heart. (824–65)

The third stasimon is usually read as a hymn to Athens in response to the departure of Aigeus (Page is particularly eloquent), but Pucci has shown that all the cultural buzz words also have more sinister uses in the play.[70] Aigeus is noble (γέννοιος), son of Pandion the wise (762, 665). His friend and strongest ally (Pittheus) is a most pious man (683–4). Creon, by contrast, gets no epithet or patronymic except as king and as

[70] Pucci (1980: 120–1), "Euripides' play obviously belongs to the garden of Aphrodite, Sophia and the Erotes, but these holy patrons intimate violence, injustice, and cunning together with grace, beauty, and wisdom."

one of the descendants of Sisyphus. Aigeus' generosity and piety will save Medea from homelessness. The chorus, like many critics, believes in the myth of Athens. The audience might be more aware of their state's treatment of foreigners and children of non-citizens and of the distrust of *sophoi* and so some of them at least might hear this song with more knowing ears, recognizing that the ideal is, as often, removed from the reality of life.

Perhaps the song in its context suggests that the ideal requires a delicate balance.

> Children of Erechtheus, wealthy of old
> and children of the blessed gods
> from a land holy and unvanquished . . . (824–6)

The audience would know of times less prosperous when citizens had to mortgage themselves to pay their debts. Thucydides' joke (1.2.5) about why Athens was never occupied by invaders may give voice to a well-known fact of life before the empire. They would also be aware that in mythical times to keep the city unravaged Erechtheus had sacrificed one of his daughters. And finally some in the audience might not have thought the Persian invasion "negligible" (as Page calls it *ad* 824).

Medea had wished Aigeus prosperity (715, ὄλβιος θάνοις, "may you die happy"), which to him depended on his fathering a child. Could this be reminiscent of a Solonian distich (13)?

> Happy (ὄλβιος) is he to whom there are dear children and solid-hooved horses
> and swift hunting hounds and a friend in a foreign land.

The first and last of the happy man's possessions are themes of the third episode.

> Feeding
> on the most illustrious wisdom (*culture*), always stepping
> delicately through the brightest air . . . (826–8)

Medea too is famous for *sophia* and we have heard what this reputation has done to her (and we know that her *sophia* has been used for bad as well as good). Like love (cf. 331 and 627 ff.) it can go either way: Aigeus respects her for it because it can be useful to him. The delicate gait in the immediate context doubtless refers to what Page (*ad* 830) calls "the spring of the vigorous athletic Athenian's step," but it may carry also a less complimentary hint of the well-known Attic love of

luxury.[71] Later similar wording comes up and there it is the narcissistic, mincing step of a girl trying on new clothes (βαίνοντες ἁβρῶς, 830; ἁβρὸν βαίνουσα, 1164, "stepping delicately"). Finally the phrase "through the clearest air" will take on a new meaning from Medea's mode of conveyance for any who might want to sing this song after the play is over. Medea's wisdom will be coming to Athens (is already there/here); for Aigeus it will not be unwelcome.

> There once they say
> the nine holy Pierian Muses
> gave birth to Golden Harmony. (830–2)

or

> Golden Harmony gave birth to
> the nine holy Pierian Muses.

On one level the chorus is clearly expressing Athenian ideology: the popular history of autochthony,[72] the myth of divine origin, and the perfection of Athenian climate and culture. Nationalistic songs may instill a proud complacency, but they have another mission: to inspire the citizens to live up to their ideals and to shed patriotic tears over the inanition of those ideals. One might imagine the intrusion of a patriotic song into a modern anti-war or pro-civil rights play or into a rock concert. The effect would be anything but literal.

Aphrodite, wisdom (or arts), love, and excellence are arranged together in the fragrant antistrophe. Kupris puts a wreath (πλόκον, 841) on her hair; Glauke will later try to shake off a similar artefact.

> Loves as co-workers with wisdom
> producers of every kind of excellence...(844–5)

In excess, however, as they had sung in the first line of the second stasimon, loves bestow neither excellence nor good repute. In Athens the balance is maintained: that, at least, is the myth: "There is no art without passion," as Hervé Guibert opined.

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[71] Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 830) also sees "the positive political connotations" of these words.

[72] On autochthony as "a form of collective snobbery" see Parker (1987: 195). On autochthony and ideology see Loraux (2000: esp. 28–38).

All members of the audience will admire this ideal, but will also know that excesses are inevitable and that gentle breezes do not last forever. Even in Athens it is not always spring.

> How will the city of holy rivers
> or the land, giver of safe conduct
> to friends, how will it lodge you, child-killer,
> not holy with the citizens (*Kovacs*)
> with the others (*codd.*)? (846–50)

Athens will receive Medea and give her a home *because* it is πομπιμὸς χώρα. In the words πομπιμός σε χώρα (848), it is as if the land itself carries her to safety. And she is a *philos*. Aigeus had accepted her as *philos* and promised her a home at his own hearth. The land cannot reject her now. Her presence will set the ideal in sharp relief, but what of the reality?

Returning to the present situation, the women of the chorus turn to Medea and supplicate her not to do this thing. "By your knees" (853) and in the corresponding line of the antistrophe (863) they picture the children falling on their knees in supplication.

This song is a paradox. In the middle of his tragedy, an art form still peculiar to Athens, Euripides inserts a beautiful ode in which his chorus tries to stop Medea from doing the thing he has invented her for, going to some lengths in changing her story. Medea *will* be able to kill her children. She will get the boldness from her own view of *aretê* and *sophia*. Before this ode, *Erôs* and *Kupris* had been the deceivers. *Sophia*, ambiguous elsewhere in the play, could be skill in good or evil.[73]

So far the choral odes have all been social commentary:

- Women will get their due.
- Love is best in moderation.
- Athens, where it is always spring, looks like a perfect society from the outside.

Fourth Stasimon (976–1001)

Though less overtly political than the three previous odes, the fourth stasimon does have some political undertones. The women express concern or pity for the children, the new bride, Jason, and especially for Medea, but none for Creon, who will lose his daughter (and his life).

[73] On the ambivalent connotations of *sophia* see Pucci (1980: 116–7, 120).

"Son-in-law of kings" (990–1) is the name they give Jason: his tragic fate cannot be separated from his political ambition. Even this late in the story (1000–1) Jason is still Medea's husband (πόσις) though he has lawlessly (ἀνόμως) gone to live with another partner in her house (ἄλλᾳ ξυνοικεῖ πόσις συνεύνῳ). After the play is over, Medea will do the same (1385, Αἰγεῖ συνοικήσουσα τῷ Πανδίονος, "to live with Aigeus Pandion's son"): she will go there to produce the next generation. The ode is political as well in its intimation of the role reversals. Jason has destroyed his home of which he was the head by moving into the house and bed of another woman in a reversal of the usual marriage in which the woman moves to the man's house. Medea too has chosen a change of partners, again against the norm, because women do not usually have a choice. Perhaps the most revolutionary role is that of the chorus, who, in their sympathy for Medea—even though it is by now beginning to fade—quite strongly place the blame on Jason (991, 1000–1).

Astrophic Choral Song (1081–115)

By the time of the astrophic choral song on child-rearing the chorus admits to a degree of subtle thinking (at that time and place thought to be) unusual in women, admitting that there is a Muse for women too (1081–9). The conclusion they come to is nihilistic: the human race would be better off not reproducing at all (1090–3), bringing to an end both *polis* and *oikos*. Several phrases in the song, however, make their conclusion less definite (1099, 1103, 1109); and in general the love and care given to children and the grief at their loss or even the thought of their loss makes the song less pessimistic though no less mournful.

By the end of the play the political element is nearly eclipsed by religious awe and human horror. In the exodos the might of kings is seen to be nothing compared to the ferocity of Medea's *thumos* and the power of her divinely sanctioned revenge.[74] Yes, she is indeed able to kill the kings and get away with it. Getting away with killing her children is never a question: of course she does not get away with it; she has sacrificed what was most dear to her. Corinth as a *polis* has lost its *turannoi* and gained a new sacred ritual. The life of the *polis* goes on

[74] Kovacs (1993: 49–52).

with the continuation of its *oikoi*, despite the unnatural interference of the royal family in private life. The chorus ends affirming, sadly, but with new insight, the stewardship of Zeus.[75]

Medea ends her sojourn in Corinth as *apolis* but it has been a long process in the play itself. A person without a city (or state) cannot be bound by its laws. Her destructiveness, though on both levels (of *polis* and *oikos*), is not absolute.[76] The city-state continues in the households of the Corinthians, represented by the chorus. The king's house is wiped out and so is Jason's. But Creon was only an intruder in their lives.

Creon, it turns out, was right to fear Medea, but only because he wronged her and she is only able to succeed with the help of his (and others') participation. His preemptive strike to drive her out before she could harm him or his family gave her the desperate power (or strong compulsion) she needed to complete her revenge. When words and reasoned argument fail there is no other recourse than action. Creon has overstepped the boundaries of political decency in his dealings with Medea. Jason has shamelessly transgressed the rules of family life. As Heraclitus (fr. 94) says on transgression in nature:

> The sun will not overstep his measures and if he does the Erinyes of Justice will find him out.

Medea, the Erinys (1260), has found the transgressors out and stopped them.

[75] For a positive interpretation of the formulaic endings of Euripidean and Sophoclean tragedies see Roberts (1987: 63–4).

[76] See McDermott (1989: 81–106) on Medea's offenses against both civic and familial *trophê*.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SLAVE'S VOICE

> Women...not only invented personal freedom but brought something special to its expression, beyond the primal desire for the removal of brute constraint...
>
> Orlando Patterson, *Freedom*

Most Euripidean tragedies begin with a monologue by a famous character from myth or legend, whether divine or human. But Euripides opens his *Medea* with an elderly female slave who is joined shortly by an elderly male slave, both of them speaking with authority about what is happening in the house and in the town, respectively. In coming outside to voice her thoughts and feelings to Earth and Sky, the Nurse asserts a freedom she does not in fact have and is quickly reminded of her object status by the next actor to make an entrance, the aged *paidagôgos* of Jason's children (at lines 49–52). The Nurse, as Other as a person can be—slave, female, foreign—is also the voice of moderation and egalitarianism (especially 119–30), making her more the spokesperson of Athenian democratic values than any of the free, male, Greek characters in the play, breaking down these distinctions based on gender, ethnicity, and status, and questioning even the self-other polarity. This chapter will consider how the slaves' words and characters illuminate those of their masters.

Much of what has been written on slavery in Euripides has to do with the captive women taken in the Trojan War.[1] But even ordinary household slaves like Medea's Nurse may "betray characteristics of the free which the free themselves do not possess"[2] and in this way

[1] The only general treatment of slavery in Euripides is Katerina Synodinou's outstanding monograph (1977). She does treat the ordinary household slaves with dignity.

[2] Croally (1994: 102–3). He goes on to say, "As was the case with women, Euripides exploits war to allow those usually denied access to civic discourse—slaves—to speak on the stage of the Theatre of Dionysus. Again, as with women, the result is an examination of a constitutive polarity which leads to a complication of the other.

cast some light on the status of their masters and what the slave/free definition means in the play and in a more general context.

In the Nurse's speech the slave's voice is heard, perhaps not crying for freedom,[3] but asserting a moment of freedom that is not hers. The old Paidagogos comments on her temporary abandonment of her duty to serve Medea (49–52), so that the audience cannot miss the fact that she is doing something unusual, something unservile. We cannot, of course, equate real life slaves with those on stage, but the fact that the old man reproaches her (51–2) for leaving Medea alone allows us to draw this parallel with the institution of slavery.[4] Medea's Nurse is not *heard* from again after the parodos (since the actor is needed for Medea herself), but the points of view she expresses (pity, loyalty, equality, the feminine perspective) are maintained from time to time. Probably she makes another appearance, when she is a functional stage servant,[5] one of the extras always available to be sent to perform a chore for her mistress, but also, even in that role, included as a member of the community of women (823) as well as a loyal slave to her masters (821, 823).[6] Medea has made loyalty to the cause of women and herself supersede all other distinctions of status (free or slave, citizen or foreign). This is not unproblematic in that Jason is also Nurse's master (83) and furthermore Medea may not be doing women's cause much good at least in the humane positivist sense. The chorus of ordinary (if increasingly enlightened) women, though sympathetic to her and indignant over her wrongs, opposes her more extreme actions. Still the power balance is unsettled.

Why does Euripides open a play that is concerned with heroic deeds and royal affairs with one and then two anonymous slaves? How does their status illuminate the central figures? This is the only surviving play of Euripides in which the character to speak first is an unnamed slave. Most of the other tragedies open with a character whose name

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Slaves—free-speaking and noble—may not produce a sustainable self-definition for the free." See also Mastronarde (2002: *ad* 119–30).

[3] See Patterson (1991: 106–32).

[4] See Gregory (2002: 147), "So long as we do not posit an exact correspondence between tragedy and real life it is, I believe, justified to enlist the tragic texts as evidence for contemporary attitudes toward questioning authority, whether in the domestic, military, or civic sphere."

[5] There is no way to "prove" that the woman sent to fetch Jason is the same as the Nurse, but it does seem both likely and economical.

[6] See Synodinou (1974: 63), "Medea in turn recognizes the nurse's devotion and makes her privy to confidential affairs, sure of her discretion."

is known from legend or with a god, the *Electra* (in which the prologue is spoken by Electra's anonymous husband, a free small landowner) being the only other exception. The initial presentation of the background story through a slave, especially a female slave, goes a long way in turning the legendary tale into a domestic drama. Who else could better present Medea's point of view?

This elderly woman is revising and wishing she could undo the heroic saga in the lurid light of Jason's betrayal. As a slave she has no life of her own. Her life depends absolutely on her masters; her world is limited by them and to them. She, like them, like her mistress especially, is an exile far from home (insofar as a slave can even be said to have a home) for whom there can be no return.[7] The tale she tells, in which she has been forced to participate, is one of heroes with limitless possibilities, who have now settled down to self-limitations. Her present and future are especially insecure. What could be more poignant than her nearly Odyssean words[8] in praise of the ideal marriage (14–5, cf. *Odyssey* 6.181–5)? The stability of her masters' union is the only security she can have. The Nurse is not altogether exempt, *pace* Pucci, from the sufferings of her mistress.[9] She feels them, understands them because they are also in part her own. Her very humanity depends upon her relations with her mistress, since as a slave she has no kin, no homeland, no home except her masters'.[10] If her mistress is put out of this house, prominent as the stage building, made alive by the animal cries that issue from it, to become a wandering, homeless beggar, what of her old slave? The saying is that there's nothing worse than being the slave of a poor man: but this would be worse, to be the slave of a homeless woman. At the beginning the Nurse does not know about the

[7] Those who survive a heroic exploit, whether a raiding mission or a war, go home (though the welcome is often not the one they hoped for). The other Argonauts picked up along the way could do that. Returning home seems to be the goal, but not so with the Woman Argonaut. In order to join the expedition she has to destroy her chances of return. Her slave is one step removed from a reality that includes homecoming.

[8] See Odysseus' words to Nausicaa, "For nothing is stronger or better than this, when man and woman, alike in their thoughts, keep their home, much sorrow to their enemies and joy to those kindly disposed to them."

[9] Pucci (1980: 41) writes "that the Nurse is exempt from the troubles, the *pathê* that she pities in Medea..." But see Synodinou (1974: 63), "the mistress' pain is hers as well." Cf. Vogt (1974: 17–8).

[10] See Garlan (1982, tr. Lloyd, 1988: 41); Garnsey (1996: 1); Patterson (1991: 10–1) on the slave as socially dead.

exile: she witnesses the situation deteriorate from bad to unendurable for her mistress and herself.

As a slave (that is, an ordinary household slave rather than a royal Trojan War captive) she does not have a tragic persona, does not participate in the tragedy. That is, at least, the common opinion.[11] But, indeed, as if Euripides knew he was exploiting her, he has given her a personality and some important words and intriguing thoughts. He has given her a story to tell. Though she is not present for the denouement, there is no question but that she is affected by it, insofar as she still exists at all as a remembered character and one who shared in the sorrows of the house. Minor characters tend to be discarded in tragedy.

And yet this woman by coming out alone to speak to heaven and earth asserts her freedom, telling intimate details, tales best left unsaid, betraying secrets to no one...and to everyone: for whether we in the audience are aware of ourselves and our role as "authorial" audience,[12] we are certainly participating in the getting of knowledge and know from the start that sympathy for Medea is not going to be easy.[13] Nurse's fear of the unfolding plot and of her mistress both foreshadows events and betrays her mistress as already guilty of two premeditated murders and even now planning or projecting others. For all the sympathy she generates for her mistress, her intimate knowledge of Medea's past and present establishes her mistress first as "of the other kind" (cf. 808) and only after situating her in heroic legend does she represent her as a woman, mother, and wife. After which she undercuts the sympathy she has just evoked by associating her mistress' immoderate temper with that of the royal family (if her words refer to Medea as well as Creon and others): the immoderate temper, after all, is tyrannical (119–21). The fear she expresses is not for herself, though as a slave she has good reason to fear for herself (37–43). Instead she is afraid Medea might do

[11] Not shared by Synodinou, but see Vogt (1974: 19), "They generally stand at the side of the action and even where they do play a major role in the plot—and this is decisive—they are not allowed a share in tragedy."

[12] Rabinowitz (1993: 127), quoting Peter J. Rabinowitz, writes of the "authorial audience" as being "aware that the work being performed is only an 'imitation.'" I use the term in an expanded definition of the audience in its capacity as participant in the construction or creation of the story.

[13] See Mossman (1995: 8), "The state of the audience's knowledge is as much at issue as the state of the author's in the criticism of drama," and, she adds, harder to recover.

herself harm or Jason or the princess and (if these lines are genuine)[14] get herself into deeper trouble. Her uneasiness about the children is more vague. Medea, she says, hates the children. They can no longer cheer her up as they used to do (36). The verbal juxtaposition of children and fear is the only anticipation of the terrible denouement until Nurse tells first the old man and then the children themselves to keep out of their mother's sight (90–3, 101–4).

Before geological and astronomical phenomena everybody is equal. In a play every character is focal (unless she is purely functional) for the time she speaks. Nurse is a functional character, a kind of *exangelos* (or messenger who comes out to report doings in the house), but her role is more than that: she has interchanges with the other slave and with the chorus. Her assertion of egalitarianism and freedom is interrupted by the next person up in the pecking order: this time by a male slave who enters from the outside, who talks of the doings of men and even of rulers, who stands in, perhaps, for all the men in the play who use and oppress women. He is also the first of a series of men who grant favors only with reluctance, asserting a kind of power through a pretense of generosity after the woman (Medea or her Nurse) has had to beg for the favor. In this way he sets up Jason in his second scene when Medea will beg him for forgiveness which he grants expansively and yet at the same time with condescension (esp. 911–3).

The old minder takes back the Nurse's fleeting steps toward freedom. He reminds her of her status and duties. He asserts control by having knowledge to dole out and the power to share it or withhold it.

A hierarchy is established from the beginning: Slave/Mistress, Wife/Husband, Jason/the royals; Humans/Gods. The man has priority over the woman. But the tyranny of Creon reduces everyone to a quasi-slavery. Medea on the other hand has the gods very much on her lips and, as we will see, on her side.

The purpose of the aged child-minder is to bring news, to set the plot in motion. The present situation is at once in crisis and stasis. It has been going on for some time, but Medea is inside in an inert depression (24–30). She is with herself, refusing to interact, basically a non-dramatic situation (or one which only the genius of Aeschylus could make worthy of the theatre). Some new ingredient is needed.

[14] Dindorf condemns 38–43; Hermann 41–3.

This is supplied on two fronts: by the arrival of the women and the pronouncement of the king.

The arrival of the Paidagogos (49–52) turns the scene into a collision of male and female stereotypes:

– He criticizes the woman for being outside (52). This is a metatheatrical comment on the scenic convention of the opening monologue and the dramatic necessity for women to come outside and break the social convention of the exclusion and seclusion of women. And it also gives Nurse the opportunity to talk about her desire.
– He reminds her of her servile condition, of her object status as a belonging of his mistress: κτῆμα δεσποίνης ἐμῆς ("my mistress' possession," 49, cf. 6, 17). *Both* are Medea's servants. His reminder is ameliorated by his acknowledgment of his own slavehood (49).
– His words, ἄγουσ' ἐρημίαν ("keeping apart," 50), are particularly pointed: as a *slave* she has *no* aloneness. *Erêmia* ("aloneness") for a slave is like *argia* ("idleness"). A slave is a belonging, always busy.

The old man's rebuke reveals the startling nature of what Nurse has been doing: asserting a self (even if it's a self without a "my" except to say "my mistress," "my master," 6, 83). And yet this woman asserts an "I" in saying "I know" (94) and "I fear" (37) and a will in wishing that events had never been set in motion. She also asserts desire (ἵμερος, 57, that she came out at all): but puts it outside herself μ' ὑπῆλθε ("[desire] came over me"). With ἐγώ she places herself in the story within her emotion:

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐς τοῦτ' ἐκβέβηκ' ἀλγηδόνος,
> ὥσθ' ἵμερός μ' ὑπῆλθε γῇ τε κοὐρανῷ. (56–7)
>
> For I have come to this state of sorrow
> that desire came over me [to tell] to earth and sky.

Nurse's assertion of a self is a betrayal of her mistress and an abnegation of her own status. She shares her own inner thoughts about her mistress and later more general reflection on both the poetic genres and the value of moderation.

The Nurse (at 53–8) also stresses the old age of her fellow slave, but his *humanity* as well, calling him ὀπαδέ ("attendant," 53; she is called a "possession" (49, κτῆμα), of her mistress' house); he belongs to the children of Jason, but is their attendant rather than just someone they own. He is defined more by his activity and duty than by his servitude.

Her own devotion makes her a good (or noble) slave (54). She uses the generalizing masculine plural (54–5): δούλοις—δεσποτῶν. When she

moves to the particular she returns to the feminine (ἐγὼ… μολούσῃ—δεσποίνης, 56–8). It is something of a paradox that she is derelict in her duty (leaving her mistress alone) precisely because she is a good (or noble) slave (54–5). Slaves in real life generally are characterized as useless, incapable of finer feelings; but Nurse is both necessary to her mistress (implied by the old man, 52) and a speaker of intelligent words.[15] Slaves in tragedy, especially in Aeschylus and Euripides, are humanized by being shown to form the relationships of care and love with their masters (or more usually mistresses) that are officially denied to them because of their servile status.[16] She speaks to earth and sky because she has no other forum for her thoughts.[17]

The old man knows about newer evils (61–2) and (63–4) the new information is given added value by being withheld (μετέγνων, "I have had second thoughts, I regret") and his enhanced status as a man is reinforced by making her (informally) supplicate him for it. The news he has to offer is a masculine story coming from the outside, imparted through a complicated sentence full of actors.[18]

His own part in the story is as an outsider, a third party but also like the very elderly men sharing gossip about the royal family. But still he is outside the scene, pretending not to listen, a conduit, not a participant. He is unseen even by his contemporaries because he is a slave.

His narrative style postpones the naming of the subject until the end of his sentence (72). Further the children are the objects of the command along with their mother. They are given a prominence as victims, because they are there in our sight and because the threat to them from Corinthian enemies is carefully established almost from the beginning of the play.

The Old Man hedges—he does not know if his information is accurate (72–3). But obviously he believes it is. Why else would he speak of νεωτέρων κακῶν ("newer evils," 62) or make this news so valuable (64, 80–1)? After very little pleading (two lines are all it takes, 65–6), the old man performs his function in the play and reveals his secret. When Creon makes his entrance we already know what he has come

[15] See duBois (1991: 52, 65–6); Fisher (1993: 105).

[16] See Vogt (1974: 17), "In Euripides these trusted servants are brought nearer to their masters as human beings than they are in Aeschylus and very much more so than in Sophocles."

[17] On slaves' appeal to the divine see Wiedemann (1987: 50).

[18] This sentence is itself almost a messenger-speech, but in miniature. See Goward (1999: esp. 15, 20).

to say, but Medea can respond with shocked αἰαῖ and φεῦ φεῦ (sounds of distress and consternation). In this way too, Medea's relationship to the women can be introduced first. When she talks to them it is as an equal, as a fellow woman, unjustly dependent on a man. Her attempt to speak to Creon as an equal fails and she is forced to take the subordinate position of a suppliant.

Katerina Synodinou, countering the opinion that slaves are portrayed as inferior because "they lack insight into the workings of the drama," contends that Euripides sometimes expresses his own opinions through slaves.[19] This passage may not be an example because it is clearly relevant to the action; other things Nurse says, however, could be. Of course the slaves are not major characters but they are shown having an intellectual conversation, one of few in the drama: critical of society and of those things free men hold dear. The Nurse, furthermore, has more insight into the workings of the drama that any of the men in the play, including her fellow slave.

The old man diminishes his colleague's brief moment of freedom also by having a wider scope, freedom of movement, and a wider circle of people from whom to gather knowledge. Even so he asserts himself to withhold her tiny step out. The knowledge she has and shares is interior, from the house and the past. His is from the greater world and concerns the future. Here in the prologue the battle of the stories begins.[20] On the other hand, Nurse not only is commanded but she too gives instructions. She must be, though a slave, one of the *philoi* who advise and try to comfort Medea (29, 142–3).

Nurse's part continues after the departure of the old man with the children. Especially pertinent to her own station are her remarks about status (119–30). Her excessive grief for the children leads her to thoughts about excess. A slave's security depends on moderation. Excess can only bring disaster in which all share, whether or not they have had any part in causing it. Her general reflection is not heroic, but it is also not servile. She is like a good Athenian democrat expressing approval of equality and the curbing of individual excess and showing how selfish individualism is inimical to the social order, and especially to one's dependents. Her praise of moderation and equality breaks down

[19] Synodinou (1977: 97–8).

[20] See Boedeker (1991: *passim*, esp. 106–9) on the new λόγοι of both Jason and Medea.

the slave/free, man/woman, citizen/foreigner polarity. The Nurse is in every way opposite to the free Greek male citizen. Slaves, women, and foreigners are supposed to be excessive, to think with their bellies, and to be incapable of *logos*.[21] By making this foreign slave woman speak as she does, Euripides is showing his audience that their stereotype is ludicrous.[22] It is also paradoxical that she uses hierarchical language when she speaks of equality (123, 126).

Her reflections on music are the most curious of her words.[23]

> You would not be wrong in saying they were fools,
> not wise at all, those men of earlier times
> who invented songs for festivals,
> feasts, and dinner parties,
> joyful sounds full of life.
> But no one has found a way with music
> on the lyre with all its strings
> to stop the hateful torments people suffer
> —deaths and terrible fates that bring down our homes.
> And yet it would help us all to be able to cure
> sadness with songs. Where there is a plentiful
> feast, why lift the voice aimlessly?
> The fullness of the table has delight enough
> in itself for most of us. (190–203)

They are part of the theme of the futility of human invention, but might also be a self-conscious reference to the art of tragedy and to this tragedy in particular.[24] Could this have to do with Medea's survival among the other goddesses of art and wisdom in what Pucci calls the holy garden of Athens?[25]

Nurse is addressed by the chorus of free citizen-women as a person of dignity and possessor of knowledge. In other plays as well (*Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*, for example) the slaves are treated with respect as knowledgeable and therefore (dramatically) valuable. The Nurse in *Medea* (more than the maid in *Alcestis*) is a person in her own right, but unlike Phaedra's Nurse, though she participates in the action and imparting of knowledge, she does not advance the plot. The plot is all Medea's.

[21] See Garlan (1988: 41); duBois (1991: 52).
[22] Garnsey (1996: 238) on fifth-century views of the injustice of slavery.
[23] For an ingenious interpretation see Crane (1990: 435–8).
[24] Pucci (1980: 24–8, 45–6).
[25] On Nurse's "theorizing on the remedial effects of song" see Pucci (1980: 24–8).

The men have made decisions and taken actions in the past to which the hero reacts and which she manipulates.

How is Nurse presented as a person? She has thoughts, feelings, judgments, reactions to injustice, and democratic political leanings. She prefigures her mistress in strong feelings. The Nurse exits (enters the house) at line 203 and is not heard from again. She is present for a seventh of the play and in more than a purely functional role. Like many prologue speakers she provides the χρόνος ("period of time") of the story into which a new character arrives to thrust the καιρός ("critical time"). Her opening speech spans the years (perhaps a decade) from the building of the Argo to the present dissolution of the household, ranges over the continents, covering a vast geographical area from Colchis across Pelion and Iolkos to Corinth, and relives the emotional life of her mistress from the girl in love to the despondent forsaken wife, and all this within the frame of her own regret. If not for this last, her own feelings and thoughts, her story might be considered functional. She "gives the background information." But it is not in the dry style of a lecture on mythology or on the purposes of a Euripidean prologue. She has come out on her own, has not been stationed by the door, nor sent to do her mistress' bidding: this fact, her desire, makes her a human agent, not a servile other. In addition, her interaction with the chorus as an equal and her intellect raise her above the status both of slave and of merely utilitarian character exploited by the author to get the story out.

We might compare her briefly with another gem of a character, the slave who surprises us by speaking from the rooftop in the brilliant opening of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. He too addresses the gods and the elements, calling for relief from his toils. Though Nurse does not address the gods in her speech, she describes Medea as doing so, θεοὺς μαρτύρεται ("she calls the gods to witness," 22), perhaps shouting the word imitatively as we may imagine the watcher on the roof to have done to call attention to himself. He too gives the χρόνος, the long weariness of one Argive. He too sets the tone of expectancy and dread as does the Nurse: though not waiting for news, she is full of fear and does in fact receive news. The watchman in *Agamemnon* also talks about himself, but what he says is "more appropriate to a slave" in that he talks about his physical discomforts and endless toils (1–3, 12–5) and his fear of sleeping on the job (14–5). Like the Nurse he expresses dread of what is in the house and like the old Paidagogos he is chary of giving out information, which serves to increase the feeling of dreadful and

alien doings in the house. Something bad will happen in this house. (Our expectations are not deceived in either play.) He believes in the therapy of song, something the Nurse wishes for (*Agamemnon* 17, *Medea* 190–203). His medicinal metaphor is for a more modest remedy (17), but Aeschylus' therapeutic poetry turns out be more ambitious, political, social, even cosmic, than Nurse's longing to treat sadness with a song. The watchman uses song to keep himself awake, but the song he always comes back to is a lament for the misfortunes of the house.

The watchman comes out (or does not come out since his is an example of what Taplin names canceled entrances)[26] not to assert freedom, but because he is constrained to be there by his masters. His prayer for release (ἀπαλλαγή, 1, 20), dependent upon the capture of Troy (29–30), however, is answered. His part in this perfect cameo is to suggest the long time of waiting at home, but it is left to the chorus to go over the whole beginning of the story and the years of the war. He does not have any interchange with the chorus. He is gone before they arrive (summoned not by him but by Clytemnestra) and does not return except as somebody else.

Before considering how these characters in *Medea* reflect aspects of their mistress, let us consider the other slaves in the story. At 820, the Nurse[27] leaves to get Jason. There is no more use for her. The plot has lost its feminine touch. Medea takes over the Nurse's role: she repeats the gesture of sending the Paidagogos into the house with the children. She repeats advice that the Nurse gave, but to herself. The two servants from the prologue, now silent, frame the scene in which Medea pretends to make up with Jason and in which she implicates her children in the murder of the princess. Like the children, the slaves are just tools in Medea's plot. Speech from them would be inappropriate and ineffectual now. There is no more they can do. One difference between the slaves is in their knowledge. At her departure to summon Jason, the Nurse is aware of Medea's plans (822–3). The Paidagogos remains ignorant (see 1015), a nice reversal of their earlier positions.

The Paidagogos returns with the children immediately after the choral song (1002). He is a double for the messenger, who follows along after the little procession to the princess (in his own reported speech,

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[26] Taplin (1977: 134–6, 276–7).

[27] We cannot know for certain that it is the Nurse, but it does seem more economical to use the same person, that is the same mask and costume, than to bring in another servant for that errand. Also, her presence at Medea's beckoning causes no surprise.

1143) and comes on stage after him. The first scene is repeated, but in reverse. The Nurse had introduced Medea, had almost stood in for Medea herself, and then the Paidagogos had brought the children back from the playground. Now he brings them home from the official delegation into the hands of Medea herself after which she has a long "monologue" with the children, a second, deeper, more internal introduction of herself. The old man's message in the first scene was bad news, the sentence of exile. After they return from the palace, he believes he is bringing good news (1010), the reversal of the children's exile (1002). The reaction each time is similarly one of consternation and despair. At the end of his stage appearances he is sent inside with the children by Nurse (90) and in the later scene by Medea (1019). Not being "one of us women" he is in the dark about Medea's real plans and tries to comfort her with the possibility of return from exile and reunion with her sons (1015).

The official messenger is also a slave, originally sympathetic to Medea (1138–9), and he still counsels immediate flight (1122–3). The servant, as usual, is shown to be better, more human than his masters (1227–9). He is shocked by the reaction of Medea to his gruesome story (1129–31). All the slaves, moreover, are more interested in the children than is Jason. Before getting to the grisly details he gives a moving domestic picture of the servants welcoming the children, their delight at what they take to be a reconciliation, all staged by Medea unbeknownst to them (1138–43). They have independent thought, action, feelings, remaining loyal, even under the changed circumstances, to Jason's progeny whom he has deserted. They do the same things Medea does, asserting a common humanity, fondling the children, touching their hands and golden hair, like surrogate parents (1141–2). The messenger asserts a self. He does something unusual, following the little procession into the women's quarters (1142–3) and watches the minutest details of the event, the rejection of the children (1147–9) and then the wheedling of the new bride by Jason (1149–55). Jason leaves, but his servant remains (1157–8). Within the scene is an old woman (1171), Nurse's double, who cries out thinking she is witnessing a divine visitation (or fit). The servants in the palace serve to humanize the princess, to show that her people are interested in her, are there to witness her triumph and defeat.

If we turn now to the status of Medea, she is mistress, *despoina* and *despotis*. She has—one would suppose—no mortal masters but invokes Hecate as *despoina* and as co-worker, putting herself and the goddess on an equal footing perhaps (and doubtless alerting us if we need it to

the fact that Medea is scarier than the average housewife who worships Hestia at her hearth). But Medea does speak of masters as if her status were more ambiguous. When she is reflecting on the status of women, speaking generally of marriage, she calls the husband a "master for the body" (233) and more specifically claims that she had been carried off as booty (256). That is, she sees that a woman's role in marriage is like that of a slave.[28] She belongs to the house and to the man. And worse than that she, like a slave, has lost her own family and home and country. Medea plays both roles as Pucci so brilliantly shows: "her whole argument," he says (69) "becomes the rhetorical display of a master disguised as a slave." Later she will call Creon's daughter *despotis*. First to Aigeus: "he has a wife, mistress of the house over me" (694). And then sending the children to the palace she enjoins them to "beseech your father's new wife, my mistress" (970). To Creon she claims that she will be silent, "defeated by my betters" (315) and Jason imitating her language and blaming her for being exiled says she could have stayed in Corinth if she had gone along with "the decisions of her betters" (449). He tries to take the role of the master in that scene and to use the kind of words that will display his mastery of language.

Let us take a closer look now at ways in which Medea both asserts and denies her object status. Inside the house Medea laments and wishes for death (96–7). Her Nurse has already brought this out of doors, but since she is a slave (one, who—unlike the captive Trojans in other plays—was probably never of noble birth) she cannot question the value of her life as Medea does (145). By the time of her last outcry Medea has turned from her own present pain to the causes of it: her perjured husband, the new bride and the royal house, and her own betrayal of her fatherland and home. Nurse in responding to the chorus is afraid she will not be able to persuade her mistress because she knows only the private Medea. But Medea does come out of the house, summoned by her own slave and the visitors. She fears their blame. She needs a wider audience before whom she will create herself.

Beginning with general remarks, she tells them what led her to decide to come out. She has, after all, made a practice of pleasing the citizens. Her distinctions reveal a hierarchical mind competing with her egalitarian spirit. This is what she has been mulling over. If she had stayed inside they might think she was stuck up as some people are, whether

[28] See duBois (1991: 90) on the analogy of women and slaves.

keeping to themselves or making a show. Or because they are retiring they get a reputation for being unproductive (215–8). People just look at surfaces (219–21). A stranger (as she is) has to learn how to behave by watching the locals (223). And having made what is often viewed as a hierarchical distinction (between citizens and foreigners), she appends, "the natives cannot be too far out of line either" (223–4). These were the reasons they might have for blaming her if she had refused to see them. But the real reason she has been keeping to herself is that her husband has broken her heart (225–6). This is something all women, whether native or foreign, can understand. Women are like slaves. They have to "buy" a husband to be their master (232–4). And as if that were not bad enough they have to submit even if they happen to get a bad master, in which case it is better to be dead (243). Women, like slaves, have no choice and this is why they are the sorriest of creatures (230–1).

Her situation is even worse and more slave-like than the common lot of women. The other women to whom she is likening herself have the community; they have fathers, mothers, brothers, kin (252–4). She is socially dead (ἔρημος, "alone," 255; ἄπολις, "without a city") like a slave, only her master has abandoned her, attesting to the utter worthlessness of her being. He could not have done this if she had been a native because her family would have protected her. After reducing herself to this most helpless position, she reasserts her independence, crying out for justice (260–1). A slave has no means of doing this. So far, however, her vengeance is just words, even though Medea projects a more visceral revenge as at least a possibility.

With the pronouncement of Creon she is reduced (that is, if only she were more of an Ismene or Chrysothemis, the ordinary woman Creon wants her to be) to a worse state than before. Even a slave has shelter, has reason to believe that she will have her basic needs taken care of. In the Creon scene, too, Medea moves back and forth from free to dependent, first addressing Creon as an equal but finally subordinating herself to him in supplication.

The loss of home and the rejection of her *logos* by Creon ultimately impel her to reject her inferior status and reassert herself as granddaughter of Helios, daughter of a noble father, a free woman (406). Never again does she accept a servile position except in her deception of Jason. Even in the first episode she expresses her disgust with having lowered herself to beg Creon (368–70). Like her slave, the still helpless

Medea begins to assert a power she cannot have and which she even admits not having.

Both Jason and Creon try to impose a weaker status on her. Creon repeats his command five times (272–3, 274, 321, 333, 351–4). Jason treats her worse, using a long list of derogatory words and demeaning expressions to describe and intimidate her: ἀμήχανον κακόν ("resourceless evil," 447), κρεισσόνων βουλεύματα ("decisions of the betters," 449), λόγων ματαίων ("empty words," 450), μωρίας ("foolishness," 456). At the end of which he calls her a *philos* and says he could never think ill of her (459–64). He denies her *charis* to him (526), her generosity (534–5), mocking her native culture and land (536–41). Finally he denies her value as a woman while at the same time deriding her for her interest in her marriage. Appropriating the children, he will have a happy life without her.[29] Women need not exist at all (573–5). He even sarcastically denies that she would have subordinated herself to his plans (588). He tries to make himself the *sôtêr* ("savior, rescuer") of the woman who saved him (595). His whole attitude is toward an unruly dependent as if he could dispose of her with his superior intelligence and money.

In the Aigeus scene Medea is at last treated by a man as an equal. They begin and end as equals. She supplicates him, but to balance that subordination she makes him take an oath to shelter her at his home where she will save him from childlessness.

After this (765) Medea is triumphant. Everyone serves her. The action is hers. From presenting herself to the chorus as having a master (233) and to Aigeus as having a mistress (694), she is now the slave owner: she will send one of her slaves to summon Jason (774). She will set up the plot knowing it will succeed in every detail. She will make the others her creatures. Not only is she heroic in temperament, she is masterful, controlling all the other players, reducing them to the level at which she had briefly seen herself. She speaks herself out of her dependent, helpless position. Into this "unpleasurable speech" (773) she adds the ingredient of necessity (791, 797): being laughed at by her enemies is not to be endured. Therefore the children *must* die and the new bride *must* die. She, no one else, imposes these nevertheless real necessities.

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[29] Gill (1996: 163). On the importance of Jason's saying "my children" see also Barlow (1995: 41).

The second Jason-Medea scene is almost a play within the play, with a change of author. It is as if she were the playwright speaking his (her) own lines as protagonist.[30] The analogy, author is to actors as masters to slaves, is suddenly apparent.

After blaming Jason[31] for everything in her speech in which she wins over the chorus, now, in a sharp turn to aggressive irony, she accepts *all the blame* herself. He is the man, of course he must be right. What if someone had missed the line (776) in which she says she will bamboozle Jason with soft words? Jason, of course, has missed that line. His knowledge of his own superiority in the *logos* department deceives him as much as her words do. He left the stage (at the end of the second episode) convinced of the truth of his current argument which he had built on stage as a rhetorical showpiece.

Medea's speech to Jason in the fourth episode is masterful. She represents herself—in this metaphor of the domination of reason over passion that reveals how deep-seated the justification of slavery is in the Greek psyche—as using *logos* to master her passion (872, διὰ λόγων ἀφικόμην).[32] In the imaginary dialogue she subordinates herself to the wiser who are also, coincidentally, the parties in power. Under Jason's tutelage she has come to a better understanding (ἄμεινον βεβούλευμαι, 893). Medea has mastered her passions with words, with those oppositions so loved by the Greeks. Not only does she argue in the abstract that reason wins out over passion, but she goes so far as to picture herself in the scene of the wedding, standing by the bride, like the mother-in-law to her own husband (887–8). She is a new woman now (893) and more like a man. After bringing out the children, introducing them to their father, reinserting him into the family, she allows herself a lapse back to her emotional side (894–905). She makes herself both: the reasonable woman (i.e. similar to a man) to whom men can talk and at the same time the emotional woman whom men can dominate. Jason then does both.

Jason accepts her change of heart (acknowledging that her κέαρ, "heart," has changed for the better, 991; she had said ἄμεινον βεβούλευμαι, "I have come to a better way of thinking," 893), another facet of his domination of her. His prerogative is to praise or blame.

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[30] See Boedeker (1991: 109).
[31] On this speech and Medea's "strategy of concealment" see Pucci (1980: 61–76).
[32] I owe these insights on the tyranny of *logos* to duBois (1991: esp. 113–26).

It's just like a woman.

> εἰκὸς γὰρ ὀργὰς θῆλυ ποιεῖσθαι γένος (909)
>
> It is natural for the female of the species to give way to passions.

In this line, the placement of the passions outside, leading or coercing the female race, shows how unruly women are. Now that she has (at long last) recognized the mastering counsel (νικῶσαν βουλήν, 912–3) she is more self-contained: γυναικὸς ἔργα ταῦτα σώφρονος ("this is the action of an intelligent woman," 913), controlling her activities within herself.

Words have become the opposite of tears (922–4). Not that words heal the pain lying behind the tears, but they are used like a slap to stop them, to try to control them. Why these tears? asks Jason. How do you deal with a woman's tears? Overpower them with *logos*: τόνδ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ δέχῃ λόγον (924, "accept this word from me"). And she answers (927–8), "Yes, I will do that. I do not disbelieve your words" [but am surrounded and overpowered by them, οὔτοι σοῖς ἀπιστήσω λόγοις, 927]. "A woman is a female thing, naturally given to tears": words are the man's; tears belong to women. But she has brought him into her sorrow and pity for the children: it's all part of the manipulation.

Having given him the right to words, she then ensnares him in her own (932): εἰς ἐμοὺς ἥκεις λόγους ("you have come into my words"). At any step Jason could have thwarted her plan, but she is as masterful, as dominating as Clytemnestra (in *Agamemnon*). He could have refused to go along with her plan in the first place, "No, I don't want these children around." But, no, she has reintegrated him into his family and accepted his story that he has done everything for the children. He cannot very well repudiate his own argument now. He could say, "Yes, I will ask Creon" and left it at that. Or "It's you he wants to be rid of anyway." But there would still be doubt and he has to express it. Creon's authority is thus maintained. Besides, the tyrant did want the children out of the way: they are a reminder of the marriage of Jason to Medea. "*Tell* your wife to *ask* her father" (942). The different verbs express the difference in status. Women are to be dominated by men's words. All that Medea cares about is getting Jason to agree to bring the children into his wife's presence: whether the girl says *yes* or *no*, whether Creon says *yes* or *no* is immaterial. Jason tries to thwart Medea's generous gift, but again she overrules him. Bring out the cloth!

"If she thinks me worthy of any *logos* she will prefer me to possessions" (962–3). Jason's *logos* again. Χρυσὸς δὲ κρείσσων μυρίων λόγων

βρότοις ("gold is worth more than ten thousand words for mortals," 965) replies Medea. Gold masters words. This is what the barbarian woman thinks of the Greek man's *logos*. Her *logos* overrides his: hers goes, "gifts persuade gods" (964). And she even gives the new bride a part in the ruse, to prove that Jason and his words are not ἄξιοι λόγου ("worthy of *logos*, worthy of mention," cf. 962). Medea's gold and Glauke's words are needed for Jason to keep his own children.

Medea's real λόγος in this scene has been a new, invented Medea who used words to dominate her self (ἐγὼ ἐμαυτῇ διὰ λόγων ἀφικόμην, "I have gone over the arguments with myself," 872), while the real Medea dominates Jason with his own (also specious) *logos*. *Logos* is associated with words of mastery, but finally gold is more powerful than words or reason and more persuasive to a bride than even her new husband. Having mastered the words and the man, in a final manipulation she refers to Jason's new wife as "my mistress" (970), a final irony, a final justification of her deeds, a final rejection of the subordinate role. In this last ironic twist, Medea has turned on its head the hierarchical Greek-barbarian polarity, by making the Greeks in the story, so proud of their superiority to the non-verbal foreigners, themselves easy prey to physical things.

For the rest of the play Medea is the master of words, of actions, and of the other players. She is addressed by two servants and the devastated Jason. The next word spoken to her is "mistress" (δέσποιν', 1002).

In the opening scene the old man tried to deny the old woman's expression of freedom. In the first two episodes men come to lord it over Medea, to deny her value, to reduce her to the status of a slave. Medea learns from the men in the play, all free, successful, powerful Greek men. And using their rules she teaches them something. Partly it is that the orderliness of men's lives is a fragile, elusive thing that can be easily returned to the primal chaos that was there before the hierarchical distinctions were made. Can she (or her creator) also be hinting that the humanity of those denied a voice, denied the right to say no, is potentially explosive enough to destroy the false and fantastic structure that excludes them?

In the battle of the stories the old woman slave narrates the adventure saga that brought her and her mistress to the center of the world for the story being enacted on stage. She wishes that story could be untold, but in telling it she spreads its truth. The old man brings another story, not a wish but a command. This is Creon's story and it too comes from a desire to untell the story of Jason and Medea. Jason and Medea, once

united in their common adventure, now have different versions to tell, each a truth, but his excluding her. He too wants a new story without her. Into this closed system enters a new character known only to Medea. His offer of asylum and a new start gives Medea the opportunity to create a new story for herself.[33] The violence of her story overpowers all the others, the endings hoped for by the characters and the other versions known to the playwright and his audience.[34] She has gone from egalitarian, using words to put herself on a par with other women and even lowering her status before them while dominating the argument with the power of herself and her words, to an absolute tyrant of *logos*, forcing the other players to serve her, using and abusing them and casting them aside. At the beginning of the play the story of Jason and the Argonauts had subsumed her story. At its end she predicts that the Argo, itself a wreck, will destroy its maker and captain. Above all she has created a self who cannot be dominated.[35]

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[33] See Gredley (1987: 31) with the arrival of Aigeus "an alternative space is opened for Medea."

[34] Boedeker (1991: 108) writes, "The new λόγος Medea has constructed negates the old glorious story of the Argo."

[35] duBois (1991: 124–5) writes, "It is necessary to isolate the logic of democracy as opposed to its historical practice. The logic of democracy, the notion of equality and equal power among members of a community, can produce an ever-expanding definition of community…Such a logic draws Euripides to a critique of gender relations in his tragedies on women."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BATTLE OF THE STORIES

> That is it, I thought. I have been rescued, and now I must act like someone who has been rescued. And so I tried. It was very strange to realize that I would not be a celebrated murderess any more, but seen perhaps as an innocent woman wrongly accused and imprisoned unjustly, or at least for too long a time, and an object of pity rather than of horror and fear. It took me some days to get used to the idea; indeed, I am not quite used to it yet. It calls for a different arrangement of the face; but I suppose it will become easier in time. Of course to those who do not know my story I will not be anybody in particular.
>
> Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*, 443

Euripides either chose to use an alternative version of Medea's story or himself radically altered the known legend. He calls attention to the change by presenting his characters trying to take over the plot, each claiming it as his or her own. Creon and Jason attempt a sequel in Corinth without Medea. But she refuses to be written out. Medea alone succeeds in taking control of the myth.

Regret and Reinventing the Past

> How I wish the Argo's sails had never swept through
> the dark blue Clashing Rocks into the land of the Colchians;
> I wish the pine trees had never fallen
> in the groves of Pelion, cut down to put oars in the hands
> of the heroes who went after the golden fleece
> for Pelias. (1–6)

The play begins (line 1) with words of regret: the heroic event should never have taken place. If only it were possible to go back and rewrite the past. Then bad things would not happen to people we love. *One past event caused all the present suffering.* Nurse regrets the story from its inception, the destruction of the forests on Pelion (3). What did it lead to? To despair and divorce. Jason regrets taking Medea aboard

his beautiful ship (1335). Medea regrets falling for his lying talk and going with him (800–2). But without this story in which they all take part not one of them would be anybody in particular. That would suit Nurse very well, because she is a slave with no name and therefore not anybody in particular anyway, and she likes that just fine (122–30). A story that everyone knows cannot be untold, but it can be retold as Euripides demonstrates again and again, and nowhere more radically than in his *Medea*.[1]

Each person has a different story to tell. Nurse begins with the hateful, fateful ship's passage. This, however, is not really *her* story, but the famous saga of Jason and the Argonauts. Her story is tied not to Jason but to Medea. Having Nurse wish away the legend is part of Euripides' plan in presenting the story predominantly from Medea's point of view. It is hard to imagine a man, especially one of the original Argonauts, saying such a thing. Few women, luckily (or not), get to participate as actively in the adventure sagas as Medea does.

Ἀργοῦς...σκάφος (in line 1) the very words defy nature. The Argo (literally "hull of the Argo") surrounds the word for "fly through." The verb διαπτάσθαι actually flies through the hull of the Argo. As if Ἀργοῦς...σκάφος were the wings of a great bird.[2]

It is an optical illusion on the page (or to the ear, an aural paradox). The word *not* is in the picture too, of course, but it has been displaced, put between the Argo and its hull. If the Argo had not flown through the Symplegades then it would have been separated, reduced to fragments by the rocks as they crashed back.[3] It cannot be an accident that the Argo is split, but the rocks are together with the adjective (κυανέας) that implies their dark, shadowy (and therefore treacherous) nature, like the sea (camouflaged in its color) or a mourning veil or Zeus' eyebrows (*LSJ*).[4]

[1] As Boedeker (1991: 104) comments perceptively, "the way Nurse evokes Jason's saga *shows* that the Argo adventure has become even to those who participated in it a famous story, a μῦθος or λόγος..."

[2] Ἀργοῦς ... < διαπτάσθαι > σκάφος (1).

[3] κυανέας > < Συμπληγάδας (2).

[4] "What is an adjective? Nouns name the world. Verbs activate the names. Adjectives come from somewhere else. The word *adjective* (*epitheton* in Greek) is itself an adjective meaning "placed on top," "added," "appended," "imported," "foreign." Adjectives seem fairly innocent additions but look again. These small imported mechanisms are in charge of attaching everything in the world to its place in particularity. They are the latches of being." Anne Carson (1998) *Autobiography of Red*, New York.

The Argo is built up from its felled trees in the prologue for eventual destruction into its planks at the end of the play[5] where (at 1386–8) Medea's thoughts return to the Argo to predict Jason's death: "You will die an evil death worthy of you, struck," πεπληγμένος (1387; are we to remember how she was struck by love, ἐκπλαγεῖσ', 8, as well as the Symplegades?)—"struck by a remnant of the Argo, seeing a poignant end to your marriage to me." The end is not the end. There is more for Jason after the play is over. He will die an accidental death, at last free of tragic, human violence, but an apt closure to the less than heroic aspects of the saga. He is doomed to remain glued to his past, howling about his losses, while she—having done more than just *wish* away her past—will have a new life in Athens completely free of the old adventures, no longer a partner in the myth of Jason and Medea. Jason, on the other hand, to the end, continues to relive the past: the taking of Medea from her foreign shores (1330), his magnificent craft Argo (1335), their flight through dangerous waters (1343), but that is elided with the present because Medea has metamorphosed into the Scylla in the shipwreck of his life.[6]

The Nurse starts with the Argo's reaching its destination (line 2, Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν). The timing of her opening words is exciting, confusing, perhaps because it is not straightforward, and by that means it is saved from being a trite retelling (or pretelling) of the background to the dramatic events to be staged. The ship has been built and is winging its way through the Symplegades. Her wish is that it had been smashed to smithereens by the clashing rocks before it ever reached that destination. She is apparently looking from both ends of the journey: the arrival in Colchis (the end of the journey-quest for the men) and then back to the ship's very beginning in the forests of Pelion and then one step back to Pelias' assignment. The end of the journey was the beginning of her own and her mistress' part.

[5] The Argo suffered a further diminution in the last century, no longer a constellation in the southern skies, it has been reduced to its parts: *Carina* (the keel), *Puppis* (the stern), *Vela* (the sails), *Pyxis* (the compass). Nurse and Medea have had the last laugh.

[6] I was happy to see that even Hanson and Heath (1998: 103) find Jason despicable: "In short, there is no more dislikable figure in classical literature than Medea's husband Jason, whom Euripides caricatures as the typical couch-lounging lout, pouting and whining through his pathetic midlife crisis." A feminist could not have written it better. But, in fact, Jason's self-justifying rhetoric hardly counts as sniveling, whining, or pouting. Nor do his cries of anguish when he is cut off from his family, country, home, and hopes, when he is nobody. Heath and Hanson trivialize the real ugliness and inhumanity of Jason's behavior and also the real pain he suffers.

At the end of line 2, the clashing rocks are closed, though in legend they had been opened by the passage of the Argo through them. The clashing rocks, once barring the way are now left behind as the ship reaches the land of the Colchians. But in her words, in her wish, they are closed, still awaiting the ship, or closed, crushing the ship.

Then she goes back to an earlier beginning. She proceeds next to dismantle the Argo into its planks. We are taken to the uncut forests of Pelion and the felling of the pines (3–4), and the putting of oars into the hands of heroes. The crew is formed by the existence and possession of oars. So the one event also has its antecedents which—since the Argo made it through—also have to be undone.

Χέρας ἀνδρῶν ἀρίστων ("the hands of heroes," 4–5): what does it mean when a slave speaks of "the best men"? What tone of voice does she use? What are the "best men" to her? Especially when one of them soon will be called the worst of men (and even worse than that, παγκάκιστος, 466) and has already proven to be faithless. Though it has not yet been said, this is what the regret is about. In the light of her generalizing comments on excess, the Nurse might be imagined to show her disapproval by an oral sneer or a gesture. That comes a little later in the play, but the actor/director/author knows all of the play at the beginning of preparing the role. Nurse is in favor of moderation, not excess. Living on an even basis is her goal. Life would be better, more secure without this kind of adventurism which disrupts the family. Nurse regrets even being part of a heroic story. And for her this wishing away the past is all there will ever be. At the end—if she were there at the end—she would only have more to wish away.

Lines 1–6 reveal the complexity of the mission which is wished away. Remorse is all that is left now that her mistress' marriage has gone wrong. The chronology is backwards. Nurse begins at the destination: the Argo reaches Colchis. Then it passes through the clashing rocks. Then the boards are cut down in Pelion.

Next Nurse goes deeper into the past, ending with the purpose of the voyage, which connects everything to her mistress' career: heroes went after the golden fleece for Pelias. The command of Pelias started it all. Nurse goes no further back than that, not even to anything in her mistress' life that antedated the docking of the Argo (because, I suppose, Medea was just an undramatic child then, a virgin princess waiting to be awakened). We all know what happened to Pelias. The *Peliades* was among Euripides' first plays. His demise is a popular subject in painted pottery.

Again the Nurse looks from both directions, the beginning of the journey and the present crisis. Pelias commands. Jason arrives in Colchis. Eventually this leads to the killing of Pelias and further flight. Pelias becomes responsible. His death at the hands of his daughters is in return for those of other victims of the heroic quest. His murder was, perhaps, a crude stab at remaking the past, by eliminating the first cause. But it was too late. It only made Medea's life harder, her choices fewer. In the Nurse's tale of overlapping travels, Medea's is in reverse of Jason's, but with Jason in tow. The return journey becomes the journey-quest of Medea.

Medea's Nurse, then, begins at the beginning of the story, which was the τέλος for Jason. The beginning for the women is the arrival in Colchis. The few strokes tell the whole story, a familiar one: a heroic quest by a group of males, bonded by their goal, and their confinement to the ship.

> Then my mistress Medea would not
> have sailed to the fortress of Iolcus' land,
> her heart battered by love for Jason. (6–8)

Lines 6–8 tell the story of Jason and Medea. This tale needs few details. It is told in two words ἔρωτι...ἐκπλαγεῖσ' (8, "smitten by love"): the familiar story of the princess and of every woman—something the chorus dreads in a later ode on the fear of falling in love. The details will come later. The *Medea is* the details.

Their story is one of movement and separation. What details Euripides gives here are in the word order. In the two lines the lovers are as far apart as possible.

Μήδεια

Ἰάσονος

Jason (at the end of line 8) is outside. Medea (in line 7) is interlocked with the event: her arrival causes disruption to the land: γῆς ἔκπλευσ' Ἰωλκίας. Her *thumos* (8) is besieged, with Jason outside, closest to the violent word "struck": ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ'. At line 9, no longer passive (as in ἐκπλαγεῖσ'), Medea's career continues with the word πείσασα, that word in turn is surrounded by 1. what she persuades (κτανεῖν) and 2. whom: the daughters of Pelias. Medea again is caught in the circumstances and controlling them as in lines 6–8.

Medea the outsider sails in, an intruder in the land of Iolkos. Her *thumos* is battered by love. Jason, another outsider, stands by at the end

of the line (8). Love is the attacker. Love of Jason—but perhaps it almost does not matter—as he will claim later: what matters is what she *did* for him, what she gave up, that she has *nothing* left in society. And his words for it οὐ κακῶς ἔχει (533, "well, that's all right then").

At line 9 Medea is in Iolkos among the daughters of Pelias. One can picture her there doing what she does here in Corinth. Persuading the women to treat their father as they do, seeming to be one of them, but always the outsider with her own agenda: her first loyalty is to herself. We expect this in the gods and in men, but in a woman, even a woman from that heroic time, it is shocking. This kind of male heroism without the "cooperative" virtues which are usually the only virtues allowed to women is always dangerous and self-destructive.[7]

> And she would not have convinced the daughters of Pelias[8] to kill their father... (9–10)

Nurse continues with the fate of Pelias: he goes very quickly from recipient of the Golden Fleece to dead (10). Πελίᾳ is the first word in line 6; πατέρα is the first word in line 10. Pelias started it all and it resulted in his death. The murder of Pelias is subordinated to Medea's final removal and settlement in Corinth. Iolkos has just been a stop along the way to Corinth and the uxorial "adventures" of Medea (11). Pelias comes up from time to time in Medea's expressions of regret over her loss of home and lack of a place to go (486, 504, 734). His or his daughters' names are also, of course, a reminder of Medea's *modus operandi* of using the children to destroy their fathers.

Nurse regrets that any of this story had taken place. She wishes it away. Expression of regret is frequent in the play, but less concentrated than in the opening soliloquy.

Creon, for example, expresses regret in the same breath that he grants Medea's request for one day to pack and make arrangements. He could hardly have denied her last plea unless he was prepared to stand around waiting for her to leave and unless he wanted to show

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[7] See Foley (1989: 82), "But above all, the poet comes closest to labeling the 'friends-enemies' ethic as destructive of humanity and human values and thus suitable only for gods."

[8] Medea was able to rejuvenate people. In order to help Jason regain the kingdom of Iolcus from his uncle who had usurped the throne, Medea offered to rejuvenate Pelias by cutting him up and putting him into a large cauldron. In the visual tradition, she persuaded his daughters to cooperate in this by rejuvenating an old ram. They tried the same with their father but he did not emerge from the pot.

abject cowardice in his fear of this woman. In case we are tempted to think too highly of Creon because of his one good deed in respecting both civic and familial *trophê*,[9] for which he meets his downfall, we might remind ourselves that he knowingly married his daughter to a man who was already encumbered with a wife and family and that he is exiling not only the embarrassing extra princess but also her children. His presence on stage must have been fairly intimidating: the chorus utters not a peep while he is there. Saying "I am not a tyrant" does not make it so.[10] His words to Medea are peremptory and his final threat of death cannot be taken lightly (353–4): "If tomorrow's sun will see you and your children inside this land you will die." Are they to die with their mother? The threat to the children from the outside (from the Corinthians) is present already in this early episode, before Medea has *done* anything. We may assume that Creon would have more fully and knowingly regretted his one decent (but still guarded) act if he had had the time. That he regrets embracing his daughter's mutilated and melted body is indicated by his failed attempt to extricate himself.

Medea's regrets are a constant: with every character and the chorus, she regrets leaving her home and family. To the chorus she expresses regret over the loss of freedom that taking a husband requires. Here she has rewritten her story to make herself more passive and therefore more like her audience of Corinthian women. With Creon she regrets her reputation for *sophia*, even though it has saved her on many occasions. Her second worst regret is summed up in line 800: "I made my mistake when I left home persuaded by the words of a Greek man" (cf. 496, where she regrets giving in to his supplication). She is still looking to the past: Aigeus gives her a future which eventually erases the past. In her scene of pretended contrition, truth is mixed with falsehood: she does indeed fear for the children's lives (930–1) and her sadness for their missed futures is reiterated in her farewell scene (especially at 1025 ff., where she is sorry to be missing scenes from their growing up, their marriages in particular). Her greatest regret must be the evil she has chosen to do, killing her children. Κακῶς φρονοῦσα (1013–4, "wrong in my thinking"), "These things the gods and I" she begins to say, but she finishes her sentence in the first person singular and feminine singular

[9] As McDermott cogently points out (1989: 81–106).
[10] We need only remember Nixon's "Your president is not a crook" speech.

participle, "I (only) κακῶς φρονοῦσα devised." Later comes her honest admission and recognition of the evil (1077–9):

> καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά...(1078)
>
> I understand the evils I am about to do...

Whether she means by this moral evils or the additional sufferings she will bring upon herself is unspecified; certainly the latter; but the former need not be ruled out. Still it is not entirely honest to regret something one will do in the future.

In the last scene her regrets are over. Gone is "and then weep" with which she has stirred herself on to the deed (1249). Her future is all action: "I will bury them" to ensure the safety of their tombs (1378–80). "I will establish a sacred ritual for them" which will guarantee a kind of survival. "I will go to Athens to live with Aigeus, son of Pandion." "And you will die struck by a plank of the Argo." We are back at the beginning of the story, which now has been wished away almost successfully. Medea will start a new life without any of the impediments of the old. In her scene with Aigeus we notice that she does not speak of her own children. She has found an asylum for herself alone. The past has been rewritten, but in its place is a worse, more scary story; but, maybe, it is a truer story.

Regrets in the last scene belong to Jason. Before that in his ever forward pursuit of fame and financial security he had been singularly lacking in regret. Now he regrets that he had ever fathered children (1413–4) to see them destroyed by her. Better not to have children the chorus had sung. Such words are not effectless. The story of these children, first brought into our sight after the Nurse has wished away the events leading to their birth, is over now. Except for the festival memorializing them and our experience of their tragedy it is as if they had never been. Jason is pathetic at the end,[11] but his new prominence in our feelings of pity does not make this his story. The audience shares his feelings that he is a survivor, when all those he cared for (sometimes without realizing it) are dead. The utter loneliness of his future, being without a home or family, without descendants and therefore failing his ancestors too, must bring tears. But is this not what every woman experiences, and Medea more than others? She has been assigned the

[11] des Bouvrie (1990: 238) speaks of the horror of having "the descent line cut off."

role of caretaker to his children until they are old enough for him to take them back into *his* family. She is, in his scheme, to have nothing. She *shows* him, and through him the audience, what it means to have no part in society.[12]

These children die in all the versions of the story. Did Medea kill them unwittingly, trying, in her role as goddess or sorceress, to make them immortal? Or were they killed by the Corinthians for revenge? Whichever was the going story when Euripides set about staging the myth, by the end the children are dead.

Medea's Aesthetic Identity

Euripides rewrites the story to allow Medea a triumphant escape and to turn *her* into an artist. He intentionally points to changes in the story so that Medea can seem to be changing it herself. Before the arrival of Creon and the turning of the static situation into a crisis, Medea had intimated her plans for revenge on her husband (and possibly on Creon and his daughter at least as a wish). At the end of the Creon scene she promises that three of her enemies will be dead: father, daughter, and my husband (374–5): this is not very imaginative. Not until Aigeus has left does she come into her own. A terrible death for the new bride and the murders of her children. This is creative.[13] Not words for pleasure, as she says, but a new and shocking version. This at least gets a rise out of the chorus who have become rather complacent in agreeing to her plans of revenge.

The important thing about Medea's new myth is that *she* is in control. She triumphs over both aspects of the old story: the male hero legend and the domestic melodrama of a woman wronged, by making it her own tragedy of revenge and victory. Jason is left behind to weep and mourn, and lay out the bodies of his dead, performing what is usually women's work.

[12] Segal (1996: 17) writes of the bold hypothesis the play explores, "Suppose that the suppressed woman of this patriarchal society had the will and the power not only to express her resentment openly but also to act on that resentment."

[13] And yet, as Holland (2003: 262–3) shows so brilliantly, the murder of the children also aligns Medea with other women who marry into the extended family of Jason: "…maternal infanticide, though rare in Greek mythology in general, is a recurring motif in this family."

Medea creates her self as a role.[14] Behind the scenes she is at first the maiden in love, a role that in truth time and the birth of children have taken from her. With the chorus she is an advocate for women and a woman treated unjustly. She tries to maintain a similar role when Creon comes on, but his prejudice against intelligent people forces her to limit herself to one aspect, that of wronged wife and single mother. Even this early, after Creon has made his exit she admits to the chorus that she has been acting a role (368–70). To Jason in their first scene, on the other hand, she is one of the heroes of the Argonautical saga, the one in fact who rescued the expedition and guaranteed its success. With Aigeus she must play the wronged wife with nowhere to turn, but she also begins to recreate the powerful, wise woman with strong herbs to restore his potency. When Jason returns, everything she says to him is pretense, though she may not be able to hide her genuine tears. In the meantime she has taken the chorus into her confidence and chosen the role that will be hers at the end. She is the only one who plays to the chorus: Creon, Aigeus, and Jason ignore their presence until the last scene when no one else is there and Jason is forced to address them as "women stationed beside the house" (1293).

In the opening speech of the first episode Medea had offered alternative characteristics of those who incur ill will (some out of sight, others in the public view, and still others from a quiet way of life, 216–8) and again to Creon (303–5) she had listed four reactions to herself as *sophê*: causing a grudge, quiet (retiring, standoffish), of the other kind, and finally hostile [the text here is doubtful]. In both these places she is thinking about how one appears to others, seeing herself as having an audience. She chooses to be "of the other kind" (808) which she defines in traditional warrior terms ("oppressive to my enemies and to my friends kindly"). She sees herself in danger of becoming an object of ridicule to her enemies, like a bad actor laughed off the stage. The chorus of women ultimately reject her as must also—sooner or later—the audience made up predominantly of men. But no one will laugh at her when she emerges at her last exit, finally free of all the other roles. One more role she had tried with her children, the role

[14] Boedeker (1991: 109) writes that in collusion with Euripides "in addition to changing the common version of the story, Medea...behaves as author or director of her own story, as she frequently plans, rehearses or comments on her own speech, and directs the words and actions of other characters as well." See also Griffiths (2006: 64, 80) and Zerba (2002: *passim*).

of loving mother which alternates with that of avenger. She cannot be both.

Even with Aigeus (and Creon to a lesser extent), she displays her control of the story, directing his gaze to her, directing his feelings, directing the oath and in a manner of speaking even determining his entrance.[15] She sends for Jason as if she were the playwright organizing the staging of the play. And she *knows* how everyone will react. Even though Creon's demise is not part of the final plan, no one (Medea least of all) is surprised by his death. Of course he would be the first to arrive when his daughter is in trouble. Line 788 shows that she has in mind multiple deaths: κακῶς ὀλεῖται πᾶς θ' ὃς ἂν θίγᾳ κόρης ("and anyone who touches the girl will die horribly"). The bad death, long, painful, public, and disfiguring, is what she has in mind for her enemies. We react to the messenger's speech as to a horrible story of a brutal murder but wonderfully told and expertly executed. Medea's reaction shocks the messenger but it also guides our reaction. And he participates in the dark, shameful pleasure we take in hearing of these deaths.[16]

The bad death is also what she saves her children from. Theirs is a "good" death: not lingering, not hostile (except for the momentary panic, itself heart-rending), almost painless. It comes before they have suffered grief or long-lasting terror. She has saved them from cruel death at the hands of her enemies, now—because of her use of them as her accomplices—also their enemies, to whom she refers over and over again. And yet this death is more terrible because we actually hear it taking place behind the scene, not through reported cries or a long narrative messenger speech. We feel the tragedy of little children in terror, trying to run from their mother, knowing she will kill them. We are made to participate in it as ineffectual witnesses to the cries of panic from the children, and like the chorus unable to act. The chorus at least cannot abstract these deaths as only an "exemplary gesture" because for them these are real children being killed in real time. Euripides is showing how difficult to achieve is the "harmonious union of reason and passion."[17] Just before the messenger's speech the chorus had sung, not at all irrelevantly, of the chances that can befall

[15] See Collinge (1950: 46), who speaks of Medea's "hypnotic effect." It is possible that Aigeus came to see her. But the reason he comes is that Medea needs him.
[16] On the ambivalence of our feelings see Lawrence (1997: 49–50).
[17] Reckford (1968: 342).

children. That is not to be the story that will be told of Medea's children. She controls their fate.

She assures their immortality in ritual. What she does not say in her farewell to them is "wait for me there." They will be forever without a mother—because her fate is of another kind.[18] She has removed her own mortal parts. She has become—but only temporarily and only after a long and terrible struggle—the divine avenger of the oathbreaker. Jason suffers the fate of all oathbreakers. Often it takes several generations, but Medea has only the revolution of one sun which Creon and theatrical economy have given her. One day is the time it takes for a trial or a series of tragedies, the time for an athletic contest or a debate in the assembly. The kind of perfection she achieves is only possible in fiction limited by its needing a beginning and end, unlike life that has too much unruly middle. But which is more immediate? Participation in a debate in the assembly over what action to take against an unfilial or rebellious distant satellite or the witnessing of domestic violence distanced from us by eons and actors?

Even in the prologue-parodos the Medea of her self-presentation is complex. Not for long the girl in love her Nurse evoked, there are already many Medeas and multiple feelings even while she remains hidden in the stage-building: her own suffering, her criminal past, the perjury of Jason bringing on her back and forth despondency, death wish, and desire for revenge. The cruelty is there too, "I wish I could see them διακναιομένους" (164, "scraped or shredded through and through"):[19] she would like to see them suffer what she is suffering. In her words she interposes herself between Jason and his bride (163, ὅν ποτ' <u>ἐγὼ</u> νύμφαν τ'). Her fantasy joins them together in their palace in a scene of mayhem that is not to be. This imaginary grouping will come about, but with Creon substituted for Jason and witnessed not by Medea but by an anonymous slave. We hear this Medea, fighting despair with rage. The Medea we see is masked figuratively as well as literally. Her naked face is hidden behind the *skênê*.

When she appears it is to give her speech to the women of Corinth, assembled there. She has made herself presentable: she is not aloof. She has received an unexpected blow that has ruined her life. She is,

[18] See Moreau (1994: 60) for citations of *Médée aux Champs Elysées*.
[19] "Not a pretty idea," as Elliot drily comments (1969: *ad loc.*).

as Pucci[20] more eloquently points out, manipulating the data here. She is creating a self, the right one for this audience.

In telling her tale (like her creator) she picks the details that she wants to have in the story. Λελῃσμένη (256, "plundered"), for example. We understand what she is doing because at the beginning of the play she is not the only author: Nurse has mentioned betrayal of home, the besieged heart, the death of Pelias; she herself (as if in an unguarded moment, unguarded because still behind the scenes) has recalled the murder of her brother (167). Still the defection of Jason was unexpected because they were getting along so well and he has gone out in secret from her to negotiate a separate future without her.

Her view of marriage as a one-sided, male-controlled institution may not reflect her own marriage, but she has to bring her audience in, so that they will be able to reflect and say "yes, it is like that." They (each one individually or as a group, for they do form into a group in the parodos) have either good or bad husbands whom their fathers chose for them. They have to be able to at least imagine the opposite. Medea has had both. She had made him a good one, when they got along and before he betrayed her. She is more generous than Jason, who in his scene will not admit to there being any good women.

The general statement she makes about women's lives does not really apply to her case. No dowry in the ordinary sense was needed (unless we count the Golden Fleece[21] and her brother's life for the safety of the voyage). The match was not made with any thought, nor in the usual way. The husband's opportunity to look for comfort elsewhere which makes his life more bearable is less true of Jason the refugee since the outside (245) is alien to him as well; but this fact also makes his straying more serious. Her repudiation of motherhood at the close of the second part of her argument is personal and might not win the sympathy of the chorus. But by putting motherhood on an equal footing with waging war, she makes them aware of something in their own lives that can be put in heroic terms, reminding them that childbirth is as full of danger and pain as facing the enemy in combat.

There is not much positive to say about the married estate: it is a great trial to get a good or bad husband, but whether good or bad,

[20] Pucci (1980: 62–82).
[21] Cf. McDermott (1989: 47), "she did bring Jason a fine dowry, the Golden Fleece…"

the man is a δεσπότης (233, "master"). Medea's own story of her "choice" of partner is a heroic story and not shared by other women (or even by many men). Instead of beginning with her own life, she begins with theirs; she brings her audience into her life, by making marriage and motherhood themselves equivalent to struggle and war, in fact more dangerous, more painful, and if one survives it is longer lasting (a struggle year in and year out, as the chorus will acknowledge in the astrophic song, esp. 1099–102). And, of course, women's lives are harder than men's and without the comforts and rewards. Having engaged the women through her disingenuous generalization of the common plight of women, Medea proceeds to enlist their sympathy by showing how her lot is worse than theirs. She creates herself anew for each audience (of one or more). This Medea is like all women, but her husband turned out to be the worst man in the world. It could have gone either way.

She accomplishes a major feat in making women *us* and men *them*. Men are the other, the outsiders in this inner group. She is an outsider too, not part of the community the Corinthian women share. She is making a new story. Being a woman makes her more part of this group than being a foreigner alienates her from it. The arrival of Creon makes this clear. He can ignore the women and address himself only to Medea. Could he have ignored a chorus of men? Medea's ability to deal with men keeps such a question from being inane.

The story moves her along. She is helpless, but helplessness makes her think of revenge. Her plan is still iffy at 260 when she asks the chorus for silence. With Creon's pronouncement she sees her position as hopeless (277) but still tries to reason her way out of it.

Medea is forced to try out several Medeas in the Creon scene. She does not succeed in her attempted creation of Creon, a Creon with whom she could carry on rational speech. She tries to get him to join her in intellectual discourse, but he refuses. In the stichomythia she manages to get from him needed information. Recognizing his royal rank she tries the ὦ πατρίς ("fatherland") gambit. He bites, admitting that his family is more important to him. Tyrants rule for their own personal pleasure and gain. She is able to force him to act more the tyrant and at the same time deny that he is temperamentally tyrannical and so relent an inch from his original pose. In cooperation Medea and Creon establish his role as father that will bring his demise.

She has had better success with the chorus. She creates a self, but also an audience. First her cry called them here and made them exist

as a group. She makes them more receptive. She puts herself in their midst. She has exited the house to enter their company. As one of them how could she incur their blame? *I* and *you* become *we*. Her address to them helps form them into this particular chorus and guide their responses. She tells them who they are and engages them in a thoughtful discourse (hardly a conversation) on *who I am*. With "we women" she has engaged them: it could happen to any of you too. After getting herself and them involved in each other's lives, ending with men's lie about women living without danger (as if they did not count the wives dead from doing their duty to their husbands' *oikoi*), she states her individual case. They learn about their own lives from seeing hers. Her strategy works. Originally the women had been concerned about the personal aspects: home, family, the marriage bed, Medea's broken heart. By the second stasimon they see homelessness and statelessness as the worst ills that can happen to a person.

After the Creon scene Medea's tone changes. She had begun with a desperate wish to see her husband and his bride destroyed with the whole house (163–4). Then comes the "if" (260–2): "if I can find a way or means (an entry or device) to get vengeance on my husband," to which the chorus agrees. Creon made her fawn and flatter. Now she begins to wrest a new self from the ruins of the girl in love and the wronged wife. She also turns Creon into her ally by adding the weight of his cruel punishment to her persuasion of the chorus.

She rediscovers herself in speaking to the chorus. Creon had asserted power by calling her names and even by giving voice to his fear: no rationally articulated pretext for the exile is needed because he has the power. She now asserts her own power over the situation and the staging of the scene by naming her act of supplication "fawning" (θωπεῦσαι). If she had had control she would not even have spoken to him. From her first words to Creon, then, she is deceiving, using strategy, in this scene which she is forced to play. In the Aigeus scene we get Medea's version of how she should be treated by royalty. What Creon calls *aidôs* ("respect, shame") Medea calls *môria* ("foolishness"), getting in the last word and affecting the chorus' interpretation of what they have seen. As critic she interprets Creon as a fool who is duped by flattery.

Her first real plans now begin. She envisions three corpses, father, daughter, and Jason. She goes through the possibilities, arson, the sword. The problem is that these require her presence in the palace and she could be caught and killed even if she could find a means of entry. And so the straight course is poison, a nice reversal of word meanings,

since women's use of stratagems and poisons are usually considered devious (crooked rather than straight). But Medea is a woman with knowledge of the growing things earth produces: poisons are women's traditional and expected tools.

She is planning, reasoning with herself, projecting the scenario, rejecting the method that would be too risky. With the choice of *pharmaka* there is no question of their efficacy. But after the enemies are dead she would be stuck in Corinth with no place to go. She never worries about transportation. Her plans do not include giving up. There is no chance that her enemies will escape retribution. If all else fails she will do it anyway and risk death.

> No, by the goddess whom I worship
> above all and have chosen as my workmate
> Hecate dwelling in the recesses of my hearth (ἑστίας). (395–7)

This oath reveals a new Medea. Hecate is a goddess of the crossroads, of the doorway, not of the hearth. And yet the interior of Medea's house is a crossroads, where she will send her children on their last sad journey before she herself exits by another route. How could she have forgotten this Medea, to fawn on Creon, to accommodate Jason? Now she is once more granddaughter of Helios. "Artists of ills" she calls women including the chorus. Like the mistress she serves she can work for good or evil. Evil, of course, for her enemies, in the heroic tradition. In her new creation she identifies herself with a powerful goddess, diverging further from the chorus. But they accept her as their spokeswoman. Through her *timê* ("honor") will come to women (see 416).

Jason comes on, not summoned by Medea, but reacting to her. Like Creon he tries to *name* her into an inferior position, blaming her for her suffering. Creon called her arts "evil." Jason, rather than calling her names, pejorates her attributes, trying to abstract or distance her from himself. But she eludes him. She cannot be defined so easily.[22] Both Jason and Creon are victims of polarized thinking. They try to define women into their system. But in their system women are defined

[22] As duBois (1991: 129) writes, "The analogical model, typical of fifth-century speculation about difference—racial, sexual, species—defined the Greek male human in terms of a series of polarities which together articulated his nature." See also duBois (1982: 120). A woman, Medea especially, is not so easy to define. It is interesting that women who were so confined should be associated with the ἄπειρον ("limitlessness").

as outside and at the same time in the center of the household. The male is associated with πέρας ("limit" or "perfection") and the female with that which is unbounded. The male excludes the female, but the female—as Medea's multiplicity illustrates—encompasses everything. For once, the men become the victims of analogy and the woman triumphs over their exclusions. In her response, Medea draws or sculpts herself in a series of visual images. Three vivid icons of Medea emerge: two upright, the last crouching.

482 ἀνέσχον σοὶ φάος σωτήριον ("I held up for you the saving light"). This as an almost sculptural group of the salvatrix like a kourotrophic goddess, protecting the hero. But also the words might recall a wedding scene—Medea, after all, was more eager than prudent and she did give *herself* in marriage. In any case it is an image of triumph and exultation, far from the demeaned self-portrait the men try to impose upon her.

497–8 ὡς μάτην κεχρῴσμεθα
κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρός

How purposelessly we were clung about
by a worthless man.

More like a theatrical scene than a free-standing sculpture, this picture recalls the previous scene in which she clung to Creon and he tried with threats of violence to shake her off. Medea yielded to Jason's supplication. Not her words as Jason had claimed but her action in saving him has been in vain. The act of supplication is repeated in the episodes and choral songs.

515 πτωχοὺς ἀλᾶσθαι παῖδας ἥ τ᾽ ἔσωσά σε ("the children wandering as beggars and I who saved you"). This last she sees as a picture, a tableau vivant, removed from reality, but seen by others as a reflection on Jason. How will it look for the new royal bridegroom that his children and wife are homeless vagabonds. But she ends the picture with ἔσωσά σε, returning to her triumphal stance. The posture of beggars is one of permanent suppliancy. Medea's last hissing words, "I saved you," before her address to Zeus are empowering, sending us back to the image of her holding up the torch. It does not belong in the pitiful vignette of paupers crouching by the wayside.

Look for images of Jason and what do we find? Nothing so clear. He makes himself a sea captain and a sophist when he mixes the sailing simile with a metaphor on language. His debate with Medea becomes one of his nautical adventures.[23] He sees himself as patriarch of a blended family and his present family as a hindrance to the continued story of his success in sea-faring (552, "taking in tow[24] many helpless encumbrances"). He works against himself in his logical argument, forgetting that Medea is as clever as he. Not for its own sake or for the sake of glory was his quest for the Golden Fleece, but for the ultimate goal of being father to royal sons and being a king himself. This life of postponement shows again his failure to live a human life. Medea, at any rate, does not succumb to Jason's attempt to belittle and blame her. Jason hurts himself also in his other representation, by making Medea one of the perils at sea. She maintains her defiance in spite of its not being in her best interest, refusing his offer of money, for example. She does this to conform to the heroic cliché that the gifts of an enemy bring no benefit. Jason does not have this in mind when he accepts her gifts for his new bride. By then Medea has reformed herself from storm to calm and Jason, unlike a good sailor, misses the hidden peril.

Aigeus' arrival in the nick of time helps Medea rebuild herself as a successful hero. His respect for her talents and his need for her services give her the means to assert her radically altered self. He arrives because she needs him. The other men have abused her and caused her to fail: κακῶς πέπρακται (364, "everything has gone badly") she said at Creon's departure. In the next breath, however, she rejected Creon's scheme (365–7) in what sounds like a vain threat against the newly-wedded couple and the king. Creon's fear of her at least gave her some credibility. The benighted Jason despises her, denying that her help meant anything to him, appropriating the children, suggesting that women have only one purpose in life and then fantasizing a better world without them. These men are imposed upon her by the plot, a plot schemed by them and excluding her. Medea even talks about this plot (585–7). Jason could have included her in the marriage scheme and then his argument that he was doing it for her would not have had the sound of a rationalization made up on the spot as he extemporizes a response to her tirade.

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[23] See Blaiklock (1955: 233–7).

[24] ἐφέλκων; the same image is used in the *Heracles* in a pathetic metaphor for a father's love and care for his children.

Medea understands the story she is in. Creon and Jason have arrogated the continuation of the Jason and Medea saga without her. She is not given much to work with, but like the playwright she uses it to the best advantage. Nothing is wasted, but elements are rearranged. She has been a major participant until now and cannot simply be given her exit line from her own life. Against the plot that was afoot when the play opened Medea counterposes another plot. She will avenge herself on those who have wronged her. In other words, she will not allow the arrangement of events made by Jason and Creon to take place. She sets her plot in motion at the end of the first episode when she says that she will wait a little longer for a protector (389–90). He arrives in the person of Aigeus, as if her words had spoken him into existence.

And they have, because this is a play. She is changing the story: the chorus has already commented on the political and cosmic significance of the men's treatment of her and her reaction to it. Between the departure of Jason and the arrival of Aigeus, the choral ode reflects the women's understanding of the current situation as a low point for Medea, homeless, friendless, without a country. Is this a cheap theatrical trick to make the arrival of the friend in need all the more affecting or a sign that the chorus is losing touch with the counterplot? Medea had stood her ground with Jason, in fact regaining her stature as his savior while demeaning him as a uxorious newly-wed.

In the past, we must suppose, Medea's relationship with kings has been less than cordial. She betrayed her father (king of Colchis); she instigated the boiling of Pelias (king of Iolcus). She has been in flight since leaving her native Colchis. We are not told the details, but probably she and the Argonauts were pursued by her father; and later she and Jason were chased out of Iolcus by the successor of Pelias (Akastos) or the irate citizens. Creon is trying to exile her from Corinth. Now Aigeus arrives. Far from being hostile and imperious, he is friendly, forthright, sensitive to both her strength and her sorrow. His arrival is Medea's first major success. Her story needs him. The facts that his entrance is out of the blue and that he has no interest in seeing anyone else in Corinth make it clear that he is indeed part of Medea's counterplot, the tower of strength, the helpful king, the one to reverse the pattern of exile by welcoming her to his hearth and city. This is confirmed by her reaction to him: the announcement of her final plans. Besides that, he is her secret, a counterpart to Jason's secret marriage to Glauke and to Creon's plot to deny Medea a home.

Now she will be victorious (765, καλλίνικοι): this is the Medea Nurse had feared and admired with the words οὔτοι ῥᾳδίως γε συμβαλὼν/ ἔχθραν τις αὐτῇ καλλίνικον οἴσεται (44–5, "no one will engage her in enmity and easily bear off the crown of victory"). The plan once formed is as good as accomplished. By having Medea share the plan, Euripides makes us accomplices. He allows us some false hopes and anxieties. But we want her to convince Jason. How can we not admire her artistry in duping him, in seeing him tripped up by his own less skillful but equally false story and argument. At the same time as we gape in horror at her deeds and her success, we admire and participate in her pleasure in leaving Jason alive as a witness to her success and as evidence of it. Earlier she had seen her enemies, Jason among them, dead. There is no future for them. Jason had mapped out a future for himself which did not include her. This in part may be said to give her the idea of making him live on, without the future he craved as a member of the royal house and for which he betrayed her. And this is what makes him so pitiful at the end.

> τόνδ' ἀπαλλάσσω λόγον. (790)
>
> I am changing this story.[25]

She changes the story so that she will not be the victim of others. From this point on her centrality is unrivaled. Using the traditional characters she has been given she will make them work to her purposes, reducing Jason to the stereotypical Greek man, believing in his superiority against all experience, and reducing the chorus to the stereotypical women gathered at the house door, despite their earlier forays into poetry and philosophy.

If there were any doubts remaining about what form Jason's heroism takes in Medea's version of their saga, his part in the fourth episode and in the reported action in the palace clear them up. His activity in the play is 1. defeating Medea in argument (as he may think, but wrongly) and 2. the expedition to Glauke which becomes a parallel to the adventure of the Argonauts. Even for this trial he tries to refuse Medea's help. Without it he would certainly have failed. Instead of going into the dragon's lair the procession goes to the women's quarters, to face not a monster, but the young bride. Medea may be foiling the hero in his adventures, but we see that his latest derring-do hardly matches

[25] McDermott (1989: 18) and (1991: 123).

his self-image as a hero and captain of the Argo. Instead of stealing gold from one king to be brought to another, Jason is bringing treasure taken from his wife to the royal house. The messenger gets picked up along the way so that he can be the Orpheus to tell the tale, to sing this new grotesque wedding song. Medea has remade Jason into a very ordinary man whose control of events (even in his own mind) extends no farther than his ability to persuade his bride and even in that he is mistaken. She remakes him, but sadly too late, into a father.

Most interesting of all is her creation of herself. "Arm yourself, my heart" (1242, ἀλλ' εἶ' ὁπλίζου, καρδία). Even after these words she tempts her well-protected heart with some final soft words: ὡς φίλταθ' (1247, "how very very dear"), ὡς ἔτικτες (1247, "how/that you gave them birth"), ὅμως φίλοι γ' ἔφυσαν (1250, "still they were dear"). The clarity with which she sees what she is doing is astonishing. If the children were left alive there would always be the risk of being humiliated again. In this, the old Medea's last short speech to herself and her audiences, before she becomes her own terrible creation, she chooses her own wretchedness over that possibility. She goes from "you" to "I," making herself two selves. The "I" is the new self she is offering which overcomes the other. The self she addresses in the second person: "arm yourself" (1242), "take the sword" (1244), "go to the tragic turning point" (1245), "do not be turned into a coward, do not remember the children, how you bore them" (1246–7), "forget for this brief day, then weep" (1247–9), "if you will kill them" (1249): this is Medea the mother, addressed by the other Medea, herself in the first person who surrounds and finally overwhelms this person. "I have decided" (1236), "I who gave them birth, I will kill them" (1241), "I am an unhappy woman" (1250). When she presented the "I" before (872–88), it was false, only made up to deceive Jason with an intimate impression of her inner self. Now she addresses her hand in the second person (1244), calls it "mine." She speaks to it as if it were other, not herself. But it is hers and it is herself. It is like the horrible, agonizing foot of Philoktetes, that hurts so much it is almost a thing in itself, not just his foot, but also himself, corrupting him and consuming him. The daring, the terrible deed separates her hand that will perpetrate it, but the pain and horror with which she finally identifies herself (δυστυχὴς ἐγὼ γυνή, 1250) make it all the more hers, one with her being. "Take the sword," she addresses it. But then she says to it, to herself, "go." When she says "do not remember the children," the hand, the instrument, is still the subject (the "you") of the command, perhaps. This is

the same hand that fondled the children in her farewell scene. But she goes on, "how you gave them birth." We see that she has become one with her hand, one with her deed. The "I" and "you" can no longer be separated. She is and has accepted the new self, the self that is forever identified with the killing of her children.

> ... the song this Silvery Moon Questing Lady of
> Dragonlight sings,
> is the tale for at least half
> of the tribe.
>
> Diane Wakoski, *Medea the Sorceress*

AFTERWORD

MEDEA AMONG US

> The creation of something new, said Eliot, alters everything that has gone before it.
>
> Martha Cooley, *The Archivist*

Euripides (or, as some say, Neophron) altered forever the story of Medea. New stories have changed how we see the Euripidean *Medea*. But it still lasts. It still has its truth. Christa Wolf's innocent Medea, a preternaturally good woman, wrongly accused, has much to say, but her story will not undo what is now believed of the child-murderess. She even acknowledges that truth.

> That's the way it is. That's what it has come to. They're at pains to assure that even posterity will call me a child-murderess.[1]

Did Susan Smith who drowned her children inside her car create something new? And does her story change what we know of Medea? Did a woman—anonymous to me—who, like Ino (though from a slightly changed venue) in the chorus' parallel, jumped off a parking garage with her two children? Or the widow in Uniontown, Washington who drowned her six children in a well on the twenty-fifth of February, 1901?[2] Does the Holocaust change how we see Medea's story or massacres and enslavements of children (Thucydides 7.29–30; 5.3, 5.32, and 5.85 ff.) during the Peloponnesian War[3] or the taking of children to be soldiers or sex slaves in the modern world? Does the threat of nuclear holocaust or fears of the Millennium, always coming for some group or another? There is no doubt in my mind that the story of Andrea Pia Yates changes how we see Medea. For the first time in filicide cases I remember, there was nearly universal sympathy (combined

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[1] Christa Wolf (1998) *Medea: A Modern Retelling* (tr. by John Cullen), New York.

[2] For this story I would like to thank Edwin P. Garretson, Jr., Professor of History at Washington State University and Archivist for the Whitman County Historical Society. The children's tragic end is marked by a stele in the Catholic cemetery in Uniontown. A piece about this event is scheduled to appear in the *Bunchgrass Historian*, vol. 32.3, early in 2007.

[3] On this see Menu (1992: 252) with references to Thucydides.

with the horror of it all) for the woman convicted of drowning her five children on the twenty-first of June 2001. And with a prosecution witness testifying about the possibility of the accused having seen an episode of *Law and Order* (a popular American television series) in which a mother killed her children and got away with it by pleading insanity, an episode that was never aired, we see in the Yates story the blurring of fictional drama and real life.

Why is Medea's story remembered for two and a half millennia and shocking but familiar to people all over the world? Are there ever reasons that would justify the killing of one's children? Belief that they are possessed by evil spirits or would grow up to be monsters? To save them from devils, disease, disgrace, or disaster, from political persecution or other tragedies of life? Fear of the end times? Hopes or expectations of immortality? In one version of the story Medea killed her children by accident while trying to make them immortal. In our version Medea kills them as "an exemplary gesture"[4] to force Jason to see what it means to be human and to live as a human being, but the other motivations are not excluded. They are Jason's children and would grow up to be *his* allies and men like their father. She also kills them to prevent their falling into enemies' hands, as happened in some other versions of the story. And possibly she kills them because she wants them dead, because she and they have more value if they are dead. Because then she is somebody in particular.

> My little children have to die, Jason so that your shameful laws can be shattered into pieces! Give me a weapon, women . . . put it into my hands. And desperate Medea drive, drive the knife into the tender flesh of these children . . . the blood . . . the sweet blood! Forget, my heart, that these are the children of this flesh . . . the blood! . . . and don't falter when they cry out: Mother, have pity! Have pity, Mother! And outside the city gates all the people will shout: Monster! Bitch! Murderess! Unnatural mother! Whore! (Softly) And I will weep and say to myself: Die . . . die and let a new woman be born. (Shouting) A new woman! A new woman! (Dario Fo, *Medea*)

In another modern *Medea*, the heroine achieves an even more chaotic life story than in Euripides' version, when her creator combines various ancient horror stories with modern acts of political and medical violence, showing that in this myth, a happy ending is nonsense.

[4] Gill (1996: 154–74).

> I want to kill my children. I want to sleep with my brother. I want to pluck out the eyes of my father. I want to blow up the Parthenon. I need a creative outlet for all this anger.
>
> [A messenger enters with the good news that Jason has been lobotomized and will return to Medea and so there is no need to kill the children to which the chorus responds and Medea joins in:]
>
> The camptown races sing a song.
> Do da, do da.
> Medea's happy the whole day long.
> Oh the do da day!...
>
> Wendy Wasserstein, *Medea*

What did the audience expect? A young woman had seen the film *Titanic* three times. After the last screening she went to the ladies' room where she found an older woman on the couch heaving in sobs. "You're upset," she said, "is there anything I can do to help?" The woman replied, "I never believed it would actually sink!"[5] It is not unlikely that there were some in the original audience of Euripides' *Medea* who said, "I never thought she would actually kill them."

And she didn't. According to Ilya (Melina Mercouri's character) in *Never on Sunday*, at the end of *Medea* "They all went to the seashore." That, too, is a truth. It was just a play.

[5] I heard this story from David Jordan, who got it from Susan Rotroff. A good story does not die.

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